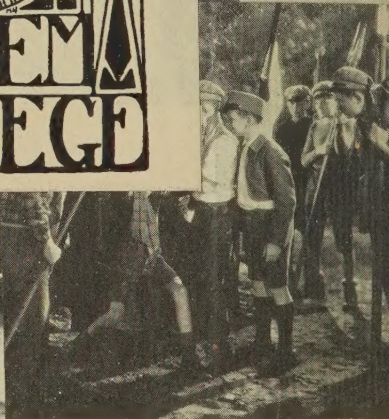
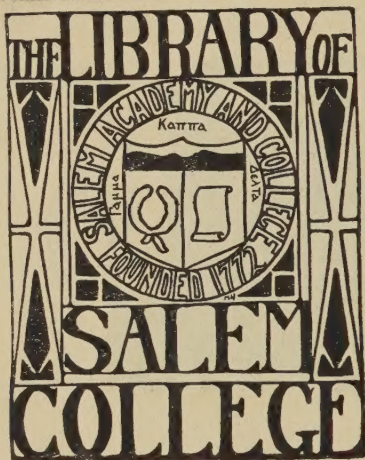
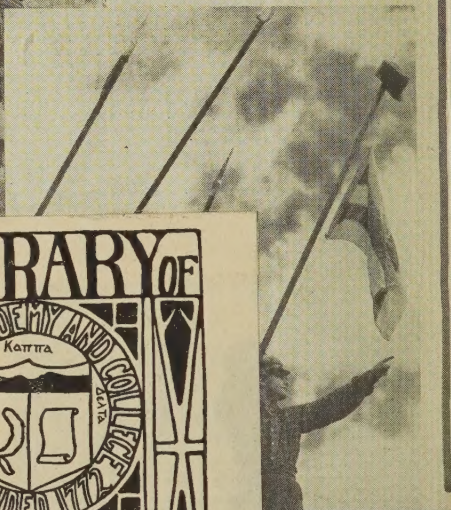
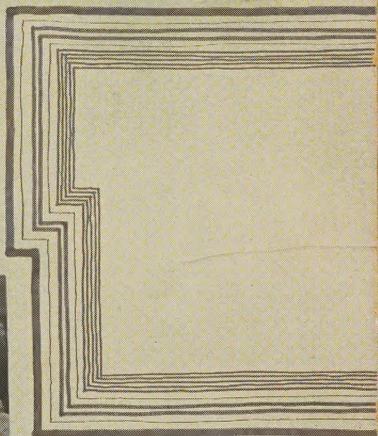
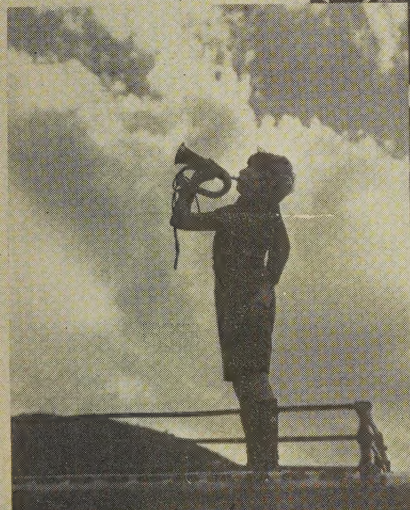


NO GREATER GLORY

FERENC MOLNAR





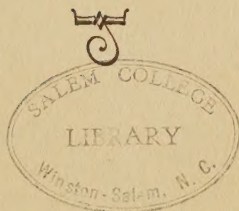
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NO GREATER GLORY

Photoplay title of
The Paul Street Boys

by
FERENC MOLNAR

TRANSLATED BY
LOUIS RITTENBERG



GROSSET & DUNLAP

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CHAPTER ONE

Exactly at a quarter of one, after repeated futile experiments, the tense anticipation was rewarded. Into the colorless flame of a Bunsen burner upon the classroom desk there suddenly burst a flash of bright emerald; the professor's efforts to demonstrate the fact that certain chemical substances are capable of changing the color of fire had proved successful. But, at the same triumphant moment, exactly at a quarter of one, there intruded the sound of a hurdy-gurdy in a neighboring courtyard. Whereupon all earnestness and attention instantly fled. The windows were wide open, welcoming the warmth of a March day, while the wings of fresh Spring breezes wafted music into the room. It was a rollicking Magyar melody which issued in march tempo from the hurdy-

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gurdy. It was so utterly hilarious an air, so Viennese in spirit, that the entire class felt tempted to smile; indeed, many among those present did not restrain this urge.

The strip of emerald in the Bunsen burner continued to flutter cheerily, and managed to attract a measure of attention among the boys seated in front. But others let their gazes stray through the window, to the roofs of the tiny adjacent dwellings. In the distance beyond, glittering in the gold of a noonday sun, a church spire hove in sight. The big hand of its clock had crept comfortingly close to the hour of recess. And the boys, intent on what was going on without, heard also sounds not altogether in consonance with this atmosphere. Conductors of horse cars blowing their sirens. Somewhere a slavey singing a tune quite unlike that of the hurdy-gurdy. The whole class grew restive. Some of the boys were fumbling among their books in the desks. The more tidy ones wiped their pen points. Boka drew a crimson leather case over his miniature pocket inkwell, an ingenious device which would never leak, save when carried in one's pocket. Csele gathered up the loose leaves that served him in place of books. For Csele, you see, was a fop. He did not care to burden his

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arms with a whole library of books, as did his classmates. He brought only the leaves absolutely needed. Even these were scrupulously distributed in his many pockets. Csonakos, sitting in the rear, was yawning like a bored hippopotamus. Weisz turned his pockets inside out, scattering the crumbs which had accumulated that morning when he nibbled pastry throughout an entire study period. Geréb shuffled his feet under the desk, as though on the point of rising. Barabás quite brazenly spread an oil-cloth wrapping across his knees, under the desk, and carefully arranged his books according to size. Then he drew a strap around the bundle with so much force that it made his desk creak. He grew red in the face.

In other words, there was a concerted movement under way to depart; only the professor failed to realize that, in another five minutes, everything would be over. For, as his artless gaze wandered over the many bland juvenile heads, he simply inquired:

“What’s up?”

Deep silence ensued. Deathly silence. Barabás relaxed his hold on the strap, while Geréb drew his feet back under himself. Weisz turned his pockets in again and Csónakos clapped a hand

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over his own mouth, smothering a yawn behind it. Csele dropped his leaves and Boka quickly put away his crimson inkwell from which, immediately upon the first touch of a pocket, there began to drip a beautiful blue liquid.

"What is it?" repeated the teacher; and by then all were motionless in their seats. Then he glanced at the window, through which entered the song of the hurdy-gurdy, as if in defiance of all professorial discipline. But the professor's glance at the window continued relentless as he said:

"Csengey, close that window."

Csengey, who was known as little Csengey, "first among the first," got up and, without permitting his grim little visage to relax, walked over to shut the window.

At that very moment Csónakos, sitting on the aisle, leaned out of his seat and whispered over to a blond little fellow, "Watch out, Nemecsek."

Nemecsek cast a sly backward squint, then looked down on the floor. A tiny ball of paper had rolled up to his feet. He picked it up and unfolded it. On one side it read: "Hand it on to Boka."

Nemecsek knew that this was merely a form of address, that he might find a real message on

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the obverse side of the paper. But Nemecsek was decidedly a person of character and would not stoop to reading anything intended for another. Therefore, he rerolled the note, waited for the most opportune moment and leaned forward into the aisle, whispering: "Boka, look out!"

Now it was Boka's turn to scan the floor, which had proved to be the best medium for their interchanges. The tiny ball came rolling toward Boka. On the other side of it, the side which, because of strong scruples, sandy Nemecsek had not read, were these words:

"At three o'clock there will be a general meeting on the Campus. Election of president. Pass on the word."

Boka pocketed the slip of paper and gave a final yank to the strap which held his books together. It was one o'clock. An electric bell began to ring. Now it dawned on the professor, too, that his class was at an end. He extinguished the Bunsen burner, indicated what the next lesson would be, and returned to his laboratory, to his collection of stuffed birds. These were perched on shelves and, whenever the door opened, their glass eyes would peek into the class room. In one of the nooks there was also a

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modest but dignified specimen of his arch secret, the terror of terrors—a yellowed skeleton.

The class dispersed rapidly. The vast, columned corridors resounded with the mad scramble of retreating feet, subsiding only when the occasional tall figure of a professor mingled with the tumultuous host of youth. Those least eager to check their paces, resumed their rush down the stairs the moment these professors vanished around a corner.

Through the gateway tumbled these youngsters, fairly hurling themselves into the street. Half of them turned to the right, the other half scurrying in opposite directions. Some of the professors, too, emerged. At their appearance, off came the tiny hats. All of them were weary and hungry as they hurried through the sunny streets. Their minds were somewhat in a daze. A daze which, at the sight of the gayety and life of the street, gradually wore off. Like so many released prisoners, they reeled about at contact with so much fresh air and sunshine. They reveled in the din and buoyancy and vividness of the city—things which to them meant merely a conglomeration of cabs, horse trams, streets and shops, through which they had to find their ways home.

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Csele, unobserved by his mates, was haggling over the price of a piece of Turkish halvah near the gate. For, you must understand, the vendor had brazenly raised his rates. It is a fact generally known that halvah sells for the same price the world over—that is, for a penny. The Turkish vendor wields his mallet, and whatever of the nut-filled white mass he chops off at a single blow sells for a penny. It is likewise understood that anything sold at the school gate must fetch no more than a penny per portion. A penny is all that you need pay for three dipped plums on a stick, three sliced figs, three prunes and three halved nuts—all of them dipped into liquid sugar. A large bar of licorice costs no more than a penny, nor a lump of rock candy. In fact, for a penny one can also buy what is known as “student fodder,” a delectable concoction wrapped in small pokes. It is a mixture of nuts, raisins, candy, almonds, dirt, bits of Johnny-bread and dead flies. For a solitary penny this “student fodder” embraces the products of all industry, and of the animal and vegetable kingdoms.

Csele was bickering, which meant that the vendor had raised his price. Those familiar with mercantile statutes know that prices have a tend-

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ency to rise when business is fraught with danger. Thus, for example, we find that Asiatic teas, transported through regions infested by brigands, are prohibitive in price. This menace is paid for by denizens of East Europe. This vendor of ours, too, was decidedly enterprising, for the poor fellow had been threatened with removal from the vicinity of the school. He knew right well that, once it had been determined to get rid of him, he would not last long; that, despite his abundance of sweets, he could not hope to smile sweetly enough to convince the professors, as they passed by, that he was anything but an enemy of youth.

"Those youngsters are spending all of their money with that Italian," said these stern mentors of education. And the vendor instinctively knew that his business would not thrive long near the *gymnasium*. That is why he raised his prices. He might as well make the most of it. He was frank enough to say to Csele:

"Before this everything penny. After this everything two pennies."

And, while managing with difficulty to grunt these words in Hungarian, he flourished his mallet in great agitation. Geréb whispered to Csele:

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"Fling your hat into his display."

Csele thought it a splendid idea. What a thrill it might give him! The sight of candy flying right and left! And what a sensation the boys might make of it!

Geréb, the imp, again whispered words of enticement:

"Go on, throw it at him. Why, he's a skin-flint!"

Csele took off his hat.

"This lovely hat?" he said mournfully.

Geréb had plainly blundered. His fascinating suggestion had been made to the wrong person. He might have remembered that Csele was a fop and carried only "leaves" to school.

"Are you afraid to risk it?" asked Geréb.

"I am," Csele replied. "But don't think for a moment that I'm a coward. I'm not. Only I haven't the heart to treat the hat so shabbily. I can prove it, too. If you want me to, I'll gladly throw *your* hat at him!"

That was too much for Geréb. It was almost an insult. He flared up about it. He said:

"If it's to be my hat, I'll do the job myself. That man is a skinflint, I tell you. If you are afraid, you'd better leave."

And with a gesture that to his mind denoted

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combativeness, he took off his hat in order to smash it across the table laden with delicacies.

But some one behind him clutched his uplifted hand. A voice of almost manly seriousness asked: "What are you trying to do?"

Geréb turned his head. It was Boka. Again he asked:

"What are you up to?"

It was accompanied by a grave but kindly look. It made Geréb wince; he growled, too, like a lion confronting its tamer. He grew sheepish. Replacing his hat, he shrugged his shoulders. Boka quietly said:

"Don't harm that man. I admire courage, but you would hardly be showing it in this case. Come along."

He held out his hand to Geréb. It was a hand stained by ink. The portable inkwell had been gayly dripping, and Boka withdrew his hand unaware of the condition of his pocket. But this did not perturb either of them. Boka calmly wiped his hand against a near-by wall. The result was that it left dark smudges on the wall; and Boka's hand was no less stained. Boka linked his arm into Geréb's, and they turned their steps homeward through the long street. Dapper little Csele remained behind. They were still

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within earshot when, with the melancholy resignation of a defeated rebel, he said to the Italian vendor:

"Well now, since everything is to be sold at two pennies from now on, you may as well give me two pennies' worth of halvah."

They even saw him reach into his neat green purse, while the vendor broke into a grin. He was probably wondering what would happen if—on the morrow—he should raise his price to three pennies? But he quickly dismissed the thought as a silly fancy. It struck him as fantastic as when one dreams that a dollar is worth a hundred. His mallet came down heavily upon the mass of halvah, and he slipped the chip into a poke.

Csele glared at him: "Why, this is smaller than before!"

Success made the vendor bold. He said with a grin: "Now more dear, so now less."

With that he turned to a new customer who, profiting by the altercation overheard, had his two pennies in readiness. With his little mallet the vendor began chopping the white mass of candy. His movements were strangely reminiscent of giant executioners one reads about in medieval fables, legendary figures in the act of

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knocking off—with tiny axes—the heads of mid-gets. He seemed to derive a sanguineous pleasure from hacking away at his halvah.

"Fie!" said Csele to the new customer. "Don't buy from him. He is a miser."

And he suddenly thrust the whole chunk of halvah into his mouth. Half the poke clung to it—inseparably, although not immune to removal by licking.

"Wait for me!" he called after Boka and Geréb, running toward them. At the first corner he overtook them. Here the three of them turned into Pipa Street heading for Soroksár Street. Arms intertwined, with Boka in the middle, they sauntered ahead while Boka earnestly and quietly, as was his wont, held forth on a topic of mutual interest. He was fourteen years old, with hardly any trace of manliness in his face. But he gained in years the moment he opened his lips. His voice was resonant, gentle and persuasive. And whatever he said had the same qualities as his voice. He rarely said anything foolish, and had not the slightest leaning toward mischief making. He never meddled in trivial squabbles and invariably declined to act as mediator. He knew all too well that decisions of that sort usually result in bitterness

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toward the arbitrator. Only when things got beyond control, when professorial interference became necessary, would Boka step in as conciliator. Conciliation does not provoke the wrath of either side. In other words, Boka seemed to be a sensible lad destined—if not to achieve great things—to take his place in life as a man of honor and integrity.

The course homeward required this youthful triumvirate to turn into Köztelek Street. This quiet little street basked sweetly in the Spring sunshine, undisturbed by the muffled hum of a tobacco factory sprawling along one side of the street. Two solitary figures were the only human beings visible at the moment to the newcomers on Köztelek Street. These were standing in the middle of the street, ostensibly on the lookout. One of them was Csónakos, noted for his great strength, the other was little Nemecsek.

Upon espying the three youngsters arm-in-arm, Csónakos became so gleeful that he whistled through his fingers like a steam engine. This peculiar blast was an accomplishment all his own. None in the fourth grade could imitate it. Nor were there many in the entire *gymnasium* capable of producing so powerful a sound, a sound which was really more familiar among

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teamsters. Cinder, president of the Literary Fraternity, was the only one definitely known to be able to whistle in the same manner. But Cinder indulged in this pastime only until he was made head of the fraternity. After that he deemed it beneath his dignity to stick his fingers into his mouth. It would hardly have been in keeping with the status of one who, every Wednesday afternoon, sat on the rostrum beside the professor of literature.

At any rate, Csónakos emitted a shrill sound. The boys walked up to the pair and stood in a group in the middle of the street. Csónakos turned to sandy little Nemecsek, saying: "Haven't you told them yet?"

"No," replied Nemecsek.

The trio asked in unison: "What?"

Csónakos answered instead of Nemecsek.

"Yesterday, in the museum, they pulled that *einstand* stunt again."

"Who did?"

"Why, those Pásztor boys."

The silence that followed was ominous.

It may be well to explain here the meaning of an *einstand*. It is a peculiarly typical term used by the children of Budapest. Whenever a brazenly fearless youngster discovers boys more

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timid than himself playing marbles or similar outdoor games, and desires to disrupt such games, he thunders: *EINSTAND*. This ugly Teutonic word indicates that the physically stronger boy regards the marbles of the other to be his rightful loot, and he is ready to employ force against all resistance. *EINSTAND*, therefore, means a declaration of war. It is likewise a terse and unmistakable way of proclaiming a state of siege; the right of force, of the fist, of brigandage.

Csele was first to speak up. A shudder ran through the sensitive Csele as he said "An *einstand*, did you say?"

"Yes," corroborated Nemecsek, his courage mounting at the realization of the deep effect produced by their information.

Then Geréb burst forth.

"We can't put up with this any longer! I have long been in favor of doing something about it, but Boka greets every suggestion with a frown. If we do nothing, they are apt to give *us* a drubbing, too."

Csónakos placed two fingers in his mouth to indicate that he was about to whistle with joy. He was ready to join every revolution. But Boka grabbed his hand.

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"Don't make me deaf, will you," he remonstrated. Then, in all seriousness, he asked the little blond: "How did it all happen?"

"The *einstand*, you mean?"

"Yes. When and where?"

"Yesterday afternoon in the museum."

By "museum" was meant the lawn surrounding that public institution.

"Well then, suppose you tell us the whole story, exactly how everything happened. We must know the truth, if we are to do anything about it. . . ."

Nemecsek became excited at the thought of being the central character in an incident of great importance. Such distinction was rarely his lot. To most people little Nemecsek was thin air. Like the figure *one* in arithmetic, he neither multiplied nor divided things. No one ever paid much attention to him. He was an insignificant, lean and weak-kneed youngster. It was probably this very inferiority which made him an ideal victim. Now he began to tell his tale, and the rest of the boys put their heads together.

"It was like this," he said. "After luncheon we went out to the museum. I mean Weisz, Richter, Kolnay, Barabás and myself. First we

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thought of playing baseball in the Eszterházy Street, but the ball belongs to the boys of the *Real* school and they wouldn't give it to us. Then Barabás suggested that 'we go to the museum to roll marbles against the wall.' And all of us did play marbles against the wall. Every one had a chance to roll a marble and the fellow whose ball struck one already rolled took the whole pot. The game had gone around several times. There must have been at least fifteen marbles at the wall. I think two of them were glassies. Suddenly we heard Richter yell: '*That* finishes it, here come the Pásztor boys!' The Pásztor boys were just coming around the corner, with hands stuck in their pockets and their heads down low. They came so slowly that all of us got scared. What difference did it make that we were five against the two of them? They are strong enough to lick ten of us. And, anyway, there's no use counting us as five because, in a pinch, Kolnay always runs away. So does Barabás. There are only three of us, at best. I myself may decide to run away, too. That leaves only two. But what good would it do if all five of us tried to run away? Those Pásztor boys are the best runners at the museum. They'd catch us in no time. So, as I say, they

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kept coming nearer and nearer and had their eyes on the marbles all the time. Said I to Kolnay: "Say, they seem to have taken a liking to our marbles." Weisz was the smartest of us because he had said right away: 'They're coming, all right. There's *einstand* in the air!' Honestly, I didn't think they would hurt us, because we had never bothered them. In fact, at first they really didn't do anything to us. They only watched the game. Then Kolnay whispered to me: 'Let's quit it.' And I said: 'I should say not, not right after you've rolled a blank! It's my turn. If I win, we'll quit.' Meanwhile, Richter had to roll, but I saw his hand tremble with fear. He kept one eye on the Pásztors and, of course, he missed. But the Pásztors did not budge. They only stood there with hands stuck into their pockets. Then I rolled. It was a strike. That made me the winner of all the marbles. I was about to go over to gather them up. There must have been about thirty in all. Just then one of the Pásztor boys jumped in front of me. It was the younger one, and he cried '*EINSTAND!*' I turned my head and saw Kolnay and Barabás beating it away. Weisz stood near the wall. He was very pale. Richter was deliberating what to do. I tried to

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reason with them. I remember saying: 'Excuse me, but you have no right to this.' By this time, the older Pásztor had nearly finished picking up the marbles and putting them in his pocket. The younger one grabbed the front of my jacket and shouted: 'Didn't you hear me say "*E I N-S T A N D!*"?' After that, of course, I didn't say another word. Weisz began to bawl. Kolnay and Kende peeped back from around the corner of the museum to see what was happening. And the Pásztor boys picked up all the marbles. Then, without another murmur, they went away. That's all."

"It's unheard of!" said Geréb in indignation.

"It's highway robbery!"

This was Csele's opinion. Csónakos blew another shrill blast to indicate that the air was full of gunpowder. Boka stood still, thinking hard. Everyone was watching him. All of them were anxious to know what Boka would have to say about these grievances; they had been in the air for months, and Boka had consistently refused to take them seriously. But on this occasion, the glaring injustice of it, as related by Nemecsek, moved Boka too. Quietly he said:

"Right now I think we ought to go to eat. This afternoon we'll be meeting on the *grund*."

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There we will talk things over. I am convinced now that it is an impossible situation!"

This declaration seemed to please all of them. Boka appeared in a very sympathetic light. The boys looked at him with affection. They were thrilled by the sight of his sagacious little head, his glittering black eyes, which at that moment were aglow with a militant blaze. They would have liked to kiss Boka for having, at last, shared their indignation.

Again they wended their way homeward. There was cheeriness in the tolling of a bell somewhere in the Joseph District, the sun shone at its brightest and everything seemed filled with joy. These boys were on the eve of great deeds. The desire to do things burned strong within them; all of them lived in anticipation of the next move. For, once Boka had declared that something must be done, something surely would be done!

On and on they went toward Üllői Avenue. Csónakos and Nemecsek fell behind. When Boka turned to say something to them, both of them were standing at a basement window of the tobacco factory which was thickly coated with fine tobacco dust.

"Snuff!" cried Csónakos boisterously, blew his

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lusty whistle and stuffed his nose full of the yellow dust.

Nemecsek, the little monkey, laughed heartily. He, too, put a frail hand on the pane and sniffed at the tip of a finger. Amid recurring sneezes, the two of them passed through Köztelek Street, elated at their discovery. Csónakos fairly boomed as he sneezed, like the roar of a cannon. The little fellow merely snuffled like a sea rabbit when annoyed. And so they sneezed and snuffled, laughed and romped. For at that moment the sum of their happiness was great indeed; they forgot even that which Boka himself, quiet and serious Boka, had declared to be something unheard of.



CHAPTER TWO

The *grund* . . . You handsome and robust lads of the wide open spaces, who need only step outside your doors to be close to limitless prairies, under a marvelous vast canopy of blue; you whose eyes have grown accustomed to great distances; you who are not wedged in between skyscrapers—you cannot possibly know what a vacant lot means to a city-bred child. To the child of Budapest it is his open country, his grassland, his plains. To him it spells freedom and boundlessness, this plot of ground that is hedged about by a rickety fence on one side, and by rearing walls stabbing skyward. By now even this *grund* on Paul Street has its mournful many-storied apartment house, none of whose tenants is aware that this morsel of ground once was the playground of the high-school boys.

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At the time of our story, the *grund* itself was empty—which may be expected of a vacant lot. Its fence ran along the Paul Street side. Two tall buildings bordered its left and right, and in the rear . . . yes, it was the rear section which rendered this *grund* most attractive, magnificent. Here, it should be noted, it was adjoined by another spacious site. This was under lease to a saw-mill concern, and the lot was thickly strewn with piles of lumber. Here stacks of firewood formed symmetrical blocks, and among these huge blocks ran little alleys. It was a veritable labyrinth. Some three-score narrow little streets intersecting each other among mute and dark stacks of wood. It was no easy matter to find your way in this maze. But he who did manage to struggle through found himself within a small clearing in the middle of which stood a tiny hut. Within it was housed the steam-saw. It was a strange, eerie little house. It was completely covered by wild grape-vine. Its graceful black chimney puffed through green foliage; at regular intervals and with clock-like regularity its clear white vapors issued forth. At such times one listening from a distance might have inferred it to be a locomo-

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tive, somewhere among the wood piles, in the throes of getting started.

All about the hut stood big clumsy vans. From time to time one of these vans would back toward the eaves, producing a creaking sound. Directly under the eaves was a small window and out of this window extended a wooden trough. As the van stopped near the window, out of the trough there suddenly began to dribble a mass of kindling wood; it fairly poured into the big van. And as the van was filled to the top, the teamster gave a shout. Thereupon the little chimney ceased its puffing, within the hut immediate silence ensued and, at the bidding of their master, the horses started off with their load. Another van—hungry and empty—rolled up to the little window and the black iron chimney resumed its vomiting, the dribbling of kindling wood was heard again. Thus it went on, year in year out. Whatever wood had been cut into bits by the buzz-saw within the hut was invariably replaced by fresh loads hauled by those big vans. In that way the vast yard was never without its wood stacks and the buzz-saw never ceased to shriek. In front of the hut stood a number of stunted mulberry trees; at the foot of one of these a rough wooden

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shack. In it lived the Slovenian night watchman, who was held responsible for possible thefts and fires in the yard.

Could there be anything more ideal as a playground? Certainly, we city boys aspired to nothing finer. Truth to tell, we could not imagine anything better or more suited to Indian games. The Paul Street lot was a beautiful piece of flatland; and that made it highly desirable as a substitute for the American prairie. The back section, the lumberyard, was all else; it was the city, the forest, the rocky mountainous region: that which we wanted it to be on any given day. Nor need you somehow get the impression that this lumberyard was an unprotected place! On top of certain larger stacks were our fortresses and citadels. It was Boka's task to ascertain which of these needed re-enforcement from time to time. The fortresses, however, had been built by Csónakos and Nemecsek. There were fortresses at half a dozen points and each one had its own captain. Captain, first-lieutenant and second-lieutenant. These comprised the army. As for privates—alas, there was only one. Throughout the whole terrain, the *grund*, all the captains and lieutenants were in command over a solitary private. This one soldier drilled

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for them and was by them court-martialed for this or that infraction.

Needless to say, this solitary private was none other than Nemecsek—blond little Nemecsek. The captains and lieutenants would gayly salute each other on the *grund*, often a hundred times in the course of an afternoon. Almost automatically their hands flew to their caps, with a merry "Hello!" on their lips.

Only poor little Nemecsek had to snap into rigid attention repeatedly, mutely saluting. And all who passed by him would shout:

"Watch your step!"

"Get those heels together!"

"Stick out your chest! Pull back your stomach!"

"Attention!"

"As you were!"

And Ernö blissfully heeded every command. There are boys who actually delight in obeying orders nicely. Yet most boys love to issue orders. Such is human nature. That is why it was the most natural thing in the world for all belonging to the *grund* to want to be officers—that is, all except Nemecsek.

At half past two that afternoon there was not yet a soul on the *grund*. On a horse blanket in

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front of the shack lay the Slovenian watchman, sound asleep. He always slept by day, for at night he had to prowl about among the stacks of lumber; often he would also sit up in one of the fortresses, blinking at the moon. Just now the saw was buzzing and the small black chimney belched forth its snow-white cloudlets of steam, while kindling wood was dribbling into the big van.

Shortly after half past two, the Paul Street gate creaked on its hinges, admitting Nemecsek. Out of his pocket he drew a large slice of bread, gazed about and, after convincing himself that there was no one present, fell to munching the crust of his bread. But before doing so, he carefully bolted the gate; one of the most stringent regulations of the *grund* made it an imperative duty for all those who entered to shut the door. Violation of this rule was punished by solitary confinement within the fortress dungeon. Military discipline in general was very strict.

Nemecsek seated himself on a rock, munched his bread and waited for the others to arrive. It was a day fraught with great expectations for those of the *grund*. It was in the air, so to speak, that big things were in store, and there was no denying the fact that at that moment

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Nemecsek felt very proud of being a member of the *grund*, of the famous association of Paul Street Boys. For a while he continued to nibble at his bread; then, feeling somewhat bored, went roaming among the wood piles. Meandering about in this fashion, he suddenly came upon the watchman's dog.

"Here, Hector!" he called; but Hector manifested no inclination to return this amiable greeting. All that he deigned was a fleeting wag of the tail, which in canine circles has somewhat the same significance as the tilting by human beings of their hats while hurrying by. With that he sprinted away, barking viciously. Nemecsek dashed after him. Hector stopped at one of the wood stacks and continued to bark vehemently. The stack was one of those on which were perched the boys' fortresses. On top of this stack was a citadel built of logs; on it was a slender stick, from the tip of which fluttered a tiny red-green bunting. Hector leapt about the fortress and barked incessantly.

"What's the trouble?" said the sandy lad to the dog, for there was a great friendship between them—perhaps because Hector was the only other private in their army. Nemecsek peered at the fortress above. He saw no one,

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but felt certain that someone was stumbling about up there. And so he began to clamber up, his feet braced against protruding logs. He was about midway when he clearly heard someone shifting pieces of wood directly overhead. His heart began to thump and he suddenly felt an urge to turn back. But, looking down, he saw Hector below, and that gave him fresh courage.

"Don't you be afraid, Nemecsek," he said to himself and continued cautiously to climb upward. At every landing he thought it necessary to encourage himself. Over and over again he said:

"Don't you be scared, Nemecsek."

And he reached the top of the woodpile. There he murmured a final "Don't be afraid, Nemecsek." He was about to step across the narrow fortress wall, but the foot he raised suddenly remained suspended in the air. So frightened was he that he merely exclaimed:

"Jesus!"

Pell-mell he clambered back down along the parapets. Upon reaching the ground, his heart palpitated furiously. He looked up to the fortress. There he saw, standing beside the flag, his right foot resting on a rampart, Feri Áts—Ter-

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rible Feri Áts—arch foe of the Paul Street Boys and leader of a rival organization. His scarlet baggy blouse fluttered in the wind. There was a smirk on his face as he quietly said:

“Don’t you be afraid, Nemecsek.”

But Nemecsek really *was* afraid, so much so that he ran away. The black dog dashed after him and together they wound their way among the woodpiles, back toward the *grund*. On wings of wind followed Feri Áts’s taunt:

“Don’t you be afraid, Nemecsek!”

By the time Nemecsek ventured to look back, Áts’s crimson blouse was no longer in sight. Moreover, the banner atop the fortress had likewise vanished. Feri Áts carried off that bit of red-green bunting, which Csele’s sister had sewn. He himself disappeared among the stacks of wood. Perhaps he made his exit through Maria Street near the buzz-saw, or he may have been hiding somewhere with his cronies, the Pásztor boys.

The thought that these dreaded brothers might be nearby sent a chill down the back of Nemecsek. He, above all others, knew full well the meaning of an encounter with those brothers. As for Áts, it was their first real meeting. It frightened him considerably, yet, in all can-

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dor, he felt strongly attracted to the lad. Áts was a handsome, sturdy youth, broad-shouldered and tanned; the loose crimson blouse splendidly matched the color of his complexion. It lent him an appearance of combativeness. There was something Garibaldiesque in that crimson blouse. As a matter of fact, all members of Áts's group, known as the Botanical Gardenites, wore crimson blouses as a tribute to Feri Áts's leadership.

Four uniform taps on the gate of the *grund* made Nemecsek breathe with relief. It was the official high-sign of the Paul Street Boys. Nemecsek rushed over and quickly opened the bolted gate. Boka, accompanied by Csele and Geréb, entered. Nemecsek could scarcely restrain himself from blurting out the dreadful news. But he was mindful of his position in the army: the humbleness that he, as private, owed his superior officers. Therefore, he stood at attention and saluted stiffly.

"Hello there!" said the newcomers. "What's new?"

Nemecsek flourished his arms and would have loved to tell everything in a single breath.

"It's horrible!" he cried.

"What is?"

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"It's dreadful! You won't believe me!"

"What're you batting about?"

"Terrible Feri Áts was here!"

Now the trio of newcomers grew serious.

"It isn't true!" said Geréb sceptically.

Nemecsek placed a hand on his chest and solemnly said:

"So help me God."

"Stop swearing," said Boka reprovingly and, to be more emphatic, he cried: "Attention!"

Nemecsek clicked his heels together. Boka stepped closer to him:

"Now, then, tell us exactly what you saw."

"When I went over there among the wood piles," began Nemecsek, "I heard the dog barking. I followed him and soon heard a crash up there in the center citadel. I climbed up and there I saw Feri Áts in his red shirt."

"You mean he stood up there? On *our* citadel?"

"Yes, sir!" insisted the sandy youth, and was on the verge of swearing again. His hand was on his chest already, but a severe look from Boka quickly made him drop it. He added: "He took our flag."

"The flag?" gasped Csele.

"Yes, sir."

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All four of them ran over to the woodpile in question. Nemecsek modestly brought up the rear, partly because he was a private and partly—perhaps chiefly—because there was no telling whether or not Feri Áts was still in hiding among the wood-stacks. They stopped in front of the fortress. Sure enough, their banner was gone; even the “flag-pole” was missing. All of them were greatly excited; only Boka preserved his wonted presence of mind.

“Tell your sister,” he said, turning to Csele, “to have a new flag ready by tomorrow.”

“Yes,” replied Csele, “but she has no more green bunting. Plenty of red but not a bit of green.”

Boka did not lose his head. Calmly he asked: “How about white?”

“She has that.”

“Tell her to make a red-white one. Those’ll be our colors from now on.”

All of them gave their assent. Boka shouted:

“Private Nemecsek!”

“Here!”

“By tomorrow you will amend the regulations to read that henceforth our colors are to be red and white, not red and green.”

“Yes, sir.”

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And, with an air of gracious condescension, Boka flung this at the stiff sandy lad:

"At ease!"

The blond little fellow "rested" dutifully. All of them climbed up to the fortress and found conclusive evidence that Feri Áts had really broken off the flag-pole, which had been nailed to a wall; the fragment holding the nail seemed woefully forlorn.

Now there were cries from the *grund*:

"Yo-ho! Ho! Yo-ho! Ho!"

That was their watchword. Evidently the rest of the "army" had arrived and were now looking for their comrades. Shrill came the sound from many juvenile throats:

"Yo-ho! Ho! Yo-ho! Ho!"

Boka beckoned to Nemecsek.

"Private Nemecsek."

"Yes, sir!"

"Answer that call!"

"Yes, sir!"

Making a megaphone of his hand, Nemecsek raised his thin childish voice:

"Yo-ho! Ho!"

Thereupon they climbed down and gathered in the clearing, where they were met by Csónakos, Weisz, Kende, Kolnay and a number of

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others. At sight of Boka all of them stood at attention, for he was captain.

"Hello, boys!" was his greeting.

Kolnay stepped out of the group, saying:

"I beg to report, sir, that the gate was not locked when we came in. Regulations require that it always be bolted on the inside."

Captain Boka bent a piercing glance on his retinue. And the others all glanced at Nemecsek. The latter had his hand on his chest again, and was about to vow that he did not leave the gate open, when the captain spoke up:

"Who came in last?"

The silence that ensued might have meant that no one had been last to enter. But only for a moment. For now the face of Nemecsek beamed with relief. Said he:

"Captain, it was you, sir, who came in last."

"I?" queried Boka.

"Yes, sir."

After some reflection, Boka said with some seriousness: "You are right. I did forget to bolt the gate." Turning to Geréb:

"Lieutenant, you will please enter my name in the black book for this."

From a pocket Geréb drew forth a small black covered note-book, into which he wrote,

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in large letters, "John Boka." And, lest he forget what the entry meant, he added the word "door." This appealed strongly to the boys. Boka was fair. This self-punishment was a splendid example of manliness such as one rarely hears of even in the course of Latin lessons, though those study periods deal abundantly with Roman character. Yet Boka was human. He, too, had his frailties. True, he had himself black-booked; but immediately thereafter he turned to Kolnay, who had reported the infraction:

"But you needn't always be tattling." To Geréb:

"Lieutenant, see that Kolnay is tried for telling tales."

Again Lieutenant Geréb fished out his dreaded note-book and jotted down the name of Kolnay. Nemecsek, standing hindmost in the group, was so overjoyed at the thought that for once his name was not being entered that he tripped a silent *csárdás*. For it behooves us to know that the little black book contained virtually nothing but Nemecsek's name. Always everyone would report him for everything. And the Court, which sat in session every Saturday, always passed sentence upon no one but Nemec-

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sek. It was inevitable. He was the only private.

And now followed the grand parley. Within the next few minutes everybody knew the big news, that Feri Áts, captain of the red-shirts, had ventured onto their premises, the very heart of the *grund*, had invaded the center citadel and carried off their banner. They all thought it outrageous, and surrounded Nemecsek who, with each telling, embellished the details of the sensational story.

"And did he say anything to you?"

"Sure!" was Nemecsek's proud retort.

"What?"

"He hollered at me."

"What did'e holler?"

"He said: 'Aren't you afraid, Nemecsek?'" Here the sandy little fellow swallowed hard; he was conscious of not having told the whole truth. Indeed, it was quite contrary to the truth. It made him out to be very brave, as if even Feri Áts had been moved to admiration by saying "Aren't you afraid, Nemecsek?"

"And you weren't afraid?"

"Certainly not. I remained standing under the fortress. Then he slid down on the other side and disappeared. He ran away."

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Geréb interposed: "That's not true! Feri Áts has never run away from anybody!"

"You sure do stick up for him!"

"I say so only," replied Geréb in a more moderate tone, "because it isn't likely that Feri Áts is scared of Nemecsek."

That drew general laughter. It was really unlikely. Nemecsek stood embarrassed in the center of the group, but thought it best to shrug his shoulders. Now Boka came forward and said:

"Boys, we've got to do something about it. We intend electing a new president today, and the one we choose must be all-powerful, whose every command will be blindly obeyed. Who knows, it all may lead to war, then we surely must have a leader who can plan things ahead—just like in real war. Private Nemecsek, step up. Attention! You will cut as many slips of paper as there are members present here. Every one will write on a slip his choice for president. The slips will be thrown into a hat, and the one receiving the largest number of votes will be our next president."

"Hurrah!" shouted the entire group; Csónakos stuck two fingers into his mouth and whistled as loud as a calliope. Leaves from note-

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books were quickly brought forth and Weisz produced a pencil. Farther back two of the boys were wrangling as to whose hat deserved the distinction. It was Kolnay and Barabás, who were habitually at loggerheads; they were now on the verge of blows. Kolnay held that Barabás' hat was too greasy to be suitable. Kende in turn contended that Kolnay's hat was much greasier. As a result of this, a grease test was immediately instituted. With penknives they set to scraping the grease off each other's sweat bands. But it was all in vain. For Csele had meanwhile proffered his natty black hat for the noble cause. Indubitably, Csele surpassed them all in matters of headwear.

Much to their general surprise, however, Nemecsek did not proceed to distribute the slips. Now that he happened to be in the public eye for the moment, he thought it to be an excellent opportunity. Standing at attention, clutching the slips in his grimy fingers, he said:

"Captain Boka, I beg to say, sir, it doesn't seem fair that I be the only private of the lot. . . . Ever since we've formed this association, everybody has been commissioned; only *I* am still a private, and everybody orders me around

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. . . and I must do everything . . . and . . .
er . . .”

Here the blond little fellow was pathetically moved and copious tears began to trickle down his delicate face.

With an elegant gesture Csele said:

“Look at him crying. Expel him.”

A voice in the rear: “He’s bawling.”

All of them burst into laughter. This made Nemecsek’s bitterness complete. His poor little heart was filled with anguish, and he gave free vent to his tears. He sobbed as he blubbered, “Just look . . . in . . . the . . . black-book . . . and see if it isn’t . . . always my name . . . that’s . . . in it . . . I . . . I . . . am everybody’s . . . dog . . .”

Boka calmly said:

“If you don’t stop bawling at once, you can’t come with us any more. We won’t play with rats.”

The word “rat” had the desired effect. Nemecsek, poor little Nemecsek, was terribly frightened and gradually stopped his weeping. The captain placed a kindly hand on his shoulder:

“If you’ll behave and distinguish yourself, you may be promoted by May. For the time being, you’ll remain a private.”

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This elicited general approval, for what would have been the use of anything, had Nemecsek been made an officer this day? There would have been no one to command. Geréb's strident voice spoke up:

"Private Nemecsek, sharpen this pencil."

Weisz's pencil was handed to Nemecsek; its point had been broken in knocking against agates in his pocket. Obediently the private took it and, standing at attention with tear-dimmed cheeks and eyes, he started to whittle; and, while sharpening, whimpering and snivelling a bit, as is customary after violent sobbing, he whittled all the sorrow and bitterness of his little heart into the Hardmuth No. 2.

"It . . . is . . . shar . . . pened . . . sir."

He handed back the pencil and emitted a deep sigh. This sigh also signified that he was resigned to remaining unpromoted for the present.

The slips were passed around. Everyone drew away to a different side, for it was a great and vital cause that was at stake. Then Private Nemecsek collected the slips and tossed them into Csele's hat. When the hat was carried around, Barabás nudged Kolnay in the ribs, saying:

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"That's greasy, too."

Kolnay peeped into the hat. And both of them felt vindicated. For if Csele's hat was greasy, too, the world must be coming to an end.

Boka read aloud the names on the collected slips, then handed them on to Geréb, who stood close by. There were fourteen slips. As he read them, one by one, they all sounded alike—Járos Boka, Járos Boka, Járos Boka—so, after the first few, he read "Dezsö Geréb." The boys looked at each other. They knew that it was Boka's own ballot; that he voted for Geréb out of sheer courtesy. Then followed another series of Boka slips. And again one for Geréb. At the very end another one for Geréb. Thus Boka had received eleven against three for Geréb. Geréb wore a smile of embarrassment. This was the first time that his rivalry against Boka had been made manifest within the organization. And these three votes were most gratifying. But two out of the three actually hurt Boka. For a moment he stopped to wonder who it might be that disliked him, then dismissed it from his mind.

"So, you have re-elected me."

Again they broke into tumultuous cheering

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and Csónakos blew a shrill blast once more. Nemecsek's eyes were still undried, but he, too, cheered enthusiastically. He was very fond of Boka.

The president now bade them be silent, for he had something to say:

"Thank you, boys. Now let's get right busy. I think it is clear to all of us that the redshirts are out to capture our *grund* and wood-stacks. Yesterday it was the Pásztor brothers who took the aggies away from our boys, today Feri Áts was seen prowling about on our grounds, and he took our flag. Sooner or later they will try to drive us away altogether. But we're going to defend the place to our last breath."

Csónakos bellowed: "Three cheers for the *grund*!"

And all hats flew up in the air. Lusty, rapturous voices cried: "Hurrah for the *grund*!"

Their eyes took in the fine, spacious lot and the stacks of lumber bathed in the sunshine of a Spring afternoon. In their eyes was reflected the ardent love they felt for this strip of land and the determination to fight for it, if need be. It was a form of patriotism. Their "Hurrah for the *grund*!" sounded as if they meant to cry

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"Long live our Fatherland." All eyes were radiant, hearts overflowing with emotion.

Boka resumed: "Even before they come here, we'll pay them a visit, right in the Botanical Gardens!"

At any other time they might have shrunk from so bold a proposal. But in this hour of enthusiasm, all hearts were as one in the vociferous reply: "Yes, we'll go there!"

And, since everyone had cried a cheery assent, Nemecsek also cried "We'll go there!" He, poor boy, was bound to remain in the rear anyway, to lug the officers' jackets. Now a vivacious voice, from the woodpiles, joined in the declaration. All of them turned in the direction whence the voice had come. It was the watchman, who stood with a pipe in his mouth, grinning. Beside him was Hector. The boys laughed as the Slovenian, in an effort to imitate them, threw his hat in the air and roared, with a pronounced foreign accent: "We go dere!"

With that, all official deliberations came to an end. Next on the program was a ball game. Someone haughtily cried:

"Private Nemecsek, go to the store-room and get the ball and bat!"

And Nemecsek ran to the store-house, which

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was hidden under one of the wood-piles. He crawled under and drew out the bat and ball. Near this same wood-pile stood the watchman, beside him were Kende and Kolnay. Kende was examining the old fellow's hat for grease spots. Finally it was generally agreed that the Slovenian's head-gear was the greasiest of the lot.

Boka walked over to Geréb and said: "I see you received three votes."

"Yes," replied Geréb proudly, and gave Boka a sharp look.

CHAPTER THREE

By the afternoon of the following day, soon after the stenography period, war plans were complete. This period was over at five o'clock, and already the street lamps were being lighted. On the way out of school Boka said to the boys:

"Before attacking them, we'll prove ourselves to be just as brave as they are. I shall take along two of our pluckiest boys. We'll go out into the Botanical Gardens. There we'll invade their own island and nail this sign to one of the trees."

Out of a pocket Boka drew a crimson sheet of paper on which was written, in capital letters, only this:

THE PAUL STREET BOYS WERE HERE!

The authors gazed in awe at the paper. Csónakos—who, though not a member of the ste-

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nography class, had joined the party out of sheer curiosity—remarked:

"You ought to write something smutty on there, too."

Boka shook his head:

"We mustn't. Moreover, we are not going to do anything at all like Feri Áts did when he carried our flag away. We'll merely show them that we are not afraid of them by going right into their own territory, where their meetings are held and their weapons are kept. This piece of red paper is our visiting card. We'll leave it for them."

Csele spoke up:

"I understand that they're usually on the island at about this time, playing some game of highway robbery."

"That won't matter. Feri Áts came to our grounds also when he knew we'd be there. Those that are afraid cannot come with me."

But no one seemed to be afraid; indeed, Nemecsek gave every sign of being courageous. Obviously, he was out to merit promotion. He stepped forward and proudly said:

"I am with you!"

It is well to note that, when in front of the school, the boys were not required to stand at

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attention or to salute; regulations applied only to the *grund*. Outside there were no distinctions of rank. Csónakos, too, came forward:

"Me, too!"

"But you must promise not to whistle!"

"I promise. Only now . . . just let me whistle once more, for the last time!"

"All right!"

And Csónakos did—in a way which warmed the cockles of his heart; it made many a passerby turn in amazement.

"There," he said happily, "that'll do me for today."

Boka turned to Csele:

"Aren't you coming?"

"I really don't know what to do," he sadly replied. "I can't go along because I've got to be home by half-past five. My mother keeps tab on the stenography period. I'm afraid that, if I'm late today, she'll never let me go anywhere again."

This prospect frightened him. That would be the end of everything; the *grund*, his first-lieutenancy.

"In that case, you had better stay. I'll take Csónakos and Nemecek along. At school, in

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the morning, we'll let you know all that will have happened."

They shook hands. Boka had another thought:

"Tell me, was Geréb at stenography class today?"

"No."

"Perhaps he is sick."

"I hardly think so. We went home to luncheon together. Not a thing the matter with him."

Boka was disturbed by Geréb's behavior. He was rather suspicious of him. Yesterday, as they parted, he had looked so strangely at him, with so much unsaid in his eyes. He had plainly betrayed the realization that, so long as Boka remained in the club, he himself had only a slight chance to advance. He was jealous of Boka. He was much too temperamental, too devil-may-care spirited; he had an aversion for Boka's placid, earnest and sensible nature. He regarded himself as more than a match for Boka.

"I wonder," mused Boka, and started off with the two boys. Csónakos walked along somewhat chestily. Nemecsek was gay and overwhelmed with joy at the thought of being one of so few to participate in so promising an ad-

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venture. He was so hilarious that Boka felt prompted to rebuke him:

"Quit this tomfoolery, Nemecsek. Don't think it is a wild party that we're going to. This is a much more dangerous excursion than you think! Just remember the Pásztor boys!"

The mere mention of that name was enough to stifle all further exuberance in the very throat of the blond little fellow. Feri Áts was terrible enough; it was rumored that he had been expelled from *Real* school. He was a boy of enormous strength, and incredibly reckless. Yet there was something sweet and lovable in his eyes, which was wholly absent from the eyes of the Pásztor boys. These always walked with their heads lowered, a grim, piercing look in their eyes. They were tanned, dark-skinned boys whom no one had ever seen laugh. Certainly, these Pásztor brothers were to be dreaded. And the three little fellows hurried along toward the outer end of that interminable thoroughfare known as Üllői Avenue. It had grown quite dark by now; night had come unusually early. All the street lights were on and the boys were made uneasy by the premature dusk. It was their wont to have some fun after luncheon. This was no time for them to be on the street,

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but to be cramming over books at home. Silently they trudged on and on and in a quarter-hour arrived at the Botanical Gardens. Tall and gaunt trees—in their early foliage—glared frightfully at them from behind a stone wall. The wind blew hard among the tender leaves and, in the darkness, the boys' little hearts thumped furiously at sight of the sprawling Botanical Gardens, with their mysterious bolted gates and weird whisperings. Nemecsek was on the point of ringing the doorbell.

"Don't, for the love of Heaven!" said Boka. "That will tip them off! We may meet them on the road . . . anyway, they're not likely to open the gate for us!"

"But how will we get in?"

Boka shot a glance at the wall: "Over that."

"The wall?"

"Yes, the wall."

"Here on Üllői Avenue?"

"Certainly not! We'll get around to the lower end of the gardens. The wall down there is much lower."

And so they turned down into the dark alley in which a wooden fence took the place of a stone wall. Here they sauntered on close by the fence, looking for a suitable place to scale.

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Finally they stopped at a spot unlit by any street light. Inside the fence, right near the boards, was an acacia tree.

"If we climb across here," whispered Boka, "it will be easy to slide down that acacia tree. It has another advantage. From the top of that tree we can also keep an eye open for the enemy."

This drew the approval of the other two, and in a moment they earnestly tackled the task before them. Csónakos crouched down and leaned his hands against the fence. Boka cautiously stepped up on Csónakos's shoulders and peeped over the top of the fence. Great silence prevailed, none of them dared to murmur. After convincing himself that there was no one near, Boka signaled with his arm, whereupon Nemecsek whispered to Csónakos:

"Lift!"

And Csónakos lifted Boka to the edge of the fence. The president of the Paul Street Boys raised himself to the topmost plank, but now the rotting structure began to creak and snap.

"Jump down!" whispered Csónakos.

A few more creaks were heard, then a dull thud. Boka found himself in the very middle of a vegetable patch. Nemecsek was next to

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climb across, followed by Csónakos. But Csónakos first climbed up the acacia tree; being a country lad, he did this most skilfully. The other two, standing below, kept asking him:

"Do you see anything?"

In a muffled tone he answered from the top of the tree:

"Mighty little. It's too dark."

"Do you see the island?"

"Yes."

"Anybody on it?"

Alertly, Csónakos swayed right and left among the branches, trying to discover signs of life in the vicinity of the lagoon:

"I can't see a thing on the island because of the trees and bushes . . . but on the bridge. . ."

Here he grew silent. Climbing another branch higher, he continued:

"I see things pretty clearly now. There are two figures on the bridge."

Boka quietly remarked:

"That's where they are. Those are sentinels on the bridge."

Then the branches crackled again; Csónakos had climbed down the tree. The three of them stood speechless for a while, pondering the next step. Presently they squatted down behind a

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bush, so as to be out of sight, and held an earnest whispered discussion.

"I think it would be best," said Boka, "if we tried to reach those old ruins by stealing along these bushes here. I guess you all know that old dilapidated fortress that's built into the hill on our right."

The other two nodded affirmatively.

"We can make it if we are cautious, crouching from bush to bush all the way. Once there, one of us will climb to the top of the hill to get an idea of how the land lies. If there is no one about, we'll simply crawl down on our stomachs. That side of the hill leads directly to the lagoon. There we can hide among the bulrushes; after that we can decide what to do next."

Two flashing pairs of eyes were leveled at Boka. Csónakos and Nemecsek held each word of his to be as sacred as the Gospel. Boka asked:

"Does that suit you?"

"Fine!" nodded the other two.

"Well, then, let's be going. Forward! Just follow close behind me. I know the way here."

And Boka began to creep on his hands and knees among the low clumps of bushes. Scarcely had his escort followed suit, when the

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sound of a shrill whistle was heard in the distance.

"We're discovered!" said Nemecsek and sprang to his feet.

"Get down! Get down! On your stomach!" commanded Boka, and all three of them lay down flat on their stomachs in the grass. With bated breath they awaited developments. Had they really been discovered?

But no one came. The wind howled through the trees. Boka whispered:

"It's nothing."

But just then another piercing whistle rent the air. Again they waited, but no one appeared. Nemecsek, trembling at the foot of a bush, spoke up:

"We ought to have a lookout on the tree."

"You're right. Csónakos, you'd better get up there again!"

Like a cat, Csónakos swiftly got to the top of the acacia tree.

"What do you see?"

"Moving figures on the bridge . . . now there are four of them . . . now two are going back to the island."

"All is well, then," said Boka at ease. "Come

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on down. Those whistles meant that the guards were being relieved."

Csónakos came off the tree and the three of them continued, on all-fours, toward the hill. Silence envelopes the vast and mystical Botanical Gardens at this time of the night. All visitors depart at the sound of a bell; none but those on evil bent remain; or those on the warpath, as were these three youngsters who, now stooped into the shape of balls, stole from bush to bush. So important seemed their mission that they did not speak to each other. As a matter of plain truth, a dose of fear gripped them, too. It required great courage to attempt the invasion of the redshirts' well-equipped fortress, which was on an island in the middle of a lagoon, especially since the wooden bridge, their only medium of access, was known to be heavily guarded. "Perhaps by those very Pásztor boys," reflected Nemecsek, and he recalled the lovely colored agates, including two glass balls. His ire rose at the thought that the dreaded *einstand* had been sounded just at the moment when it would have been his turn to roll, and he might have won all those pretty playing-marbles. . . .

"Ouch!" Nemecsek suddenly cried.

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His companions stopped crawling in their fright.

"What's the trouble?"

Nemecsek was on his knees by now, with a finger deep in his mouth.

"What's happened to you?"

Without removing the finger from his mouth, Nemecsek replied:

"I stepped into some nettles—with my hand!"

"Keep sucking it, daddykin," said Csónakos, but he was prudent enough to tie a kerchief around his own hand.

And so they crept and crawled onward and soon reached the hill. Here, into one side of the hill some one had built one of those artificial miniature ruins to be found in gardens of the affluent, exact replicas of ancient fortresses, the crevices of which are filled with artificial moss.

"Here are the fortress ruins," explained Boka. "We've got to be careful, for I was told that the redshirts are in the habit of making excursions to this place, too."

Csónakos felt moved to ask:

"What sort of a fortress is this? History tells us nothing about a fortress in the Botanical Gardens. . ."

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"These are merely ruins . . . built just to be ruins."

Nemecsek burst out mirthfully:

"Why didn't they build a new fortress while they were at it? A hundred years from now it would have been in ruins anyway. . . ."

"My, but you're feeling gay!" said Boka scathingly. "I'll bet you won't think it so funny when you meet those Pásztor boys."

Indeed, little Nemecsek made a wry face at this. He was the sort of youngster who, unless occasionally reminded, forgot that there was trouble ahead.

Right after this, they began to climb, among elder bushes, toward the hilltop, their hands clutching protruding stones in the ruins. This time Csónakos took the lead. Suddenly he stopped, just as he was, on his hands and knees. He raised his right arm, turned his head and said in alarm:

"There's somebody close by."

They dropped down into the tall grass; their tiny figures well hidden among weeds and underbrush. Only their eyes glittered in the thicket. They were listening.

"Csónakos, put your ear to the ground," commanded Boka in a whisper. "That's how the In-

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dians listen. It makes it easy to hear if any one happens to be walking in the vicinity."

Csónakos did as he was told to. He threw himself prone on the ground and found a place where there was no grass; here he bent his ear to the ground, but quickly drew it back.

"They're coming!" he whispered, terror-stricken.

By now it was clearly audible, even without Indian methods, that someone was scampering through the bushes. And this mysterious someone seemed to be heading straight toward them. The boys grew shaky and buried their heads in the grass. Only Nemecsek spoke in a low, whining tone:

"I'd like to go home."

Csónakos did not lose his cheeriness. He said:

"Down on your belly, daddykin."

But, since even this failed to bolster up the courage of Nemecsek, Boka stuck his head out of the grass and, with eyes angrily flashing but in a whisper that could not betray their whereabouts, said:

"Private Nemecsek, get down on your stomach!"

This command brooked no refusal. Nemecsek flattened out. The mysterious somebody

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continued to scamper on, but seemed to have changed his course. Boka stood up on his toes again and scanned his surroundings. He saw a dark figure going downhill and poking his stick into the bushes.

"He's gone," said Boka to the boys hugging the grass. "It was the night watchman."

"You mean the redshirts' watchman?"

"No. The watchman of the Gardens."

That made them sigh with relief. No adult could scare them. An example of this was the episode in which an old scab-nosed veteran in the Museum Gardens was routed by them recently. They resumed their climbing. But that seemed to have attracted the attention of the watchman, for he stopped and pricked his ears.

"We're discovered," stammered Nemecsek. Both he and Csónakos looked at Boka for further guidance.

"Into the ruins!" came the sharp order.

All three of them ran pell-mell down the hill which they had so laboriously surmounted. The ruins had a number of small ridged windows. The boys were aghast at the discovery that the first of these was shut off by iron bars. Tip-toeing to the next one, they were similarly thwarted. Finally they came to a spot where

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there was a cleft in the wall just large enough to admit them. They held their breath as they quickly crawled through into the dark narrow chamber. Soon after that the watchman passed by. They could see that he was leaving that section in order to get to his own abode on the Üllői Avenue side.

"Thank God," spoke up Csónakos, "that's over."

Only now did they feel safe enough to inspect their surroundings. It was a dank, musty place, somewhat akin to a dungeon in a real fortress. Prowling about the chamber, Boka suddenly stopped. He had stumbled over something. He bent down and picked up the object. His companions bounded over close to him, and in the meager light of sunset they discovered this something to be an Indian tomahawk. It was carved of wood and covered over with tin foil. It glistened terrifyingly in the dark.

"This is theirs!" said Nemecsek with awe.

"That's right," remarked Boka, "and since we found this one there must be many more around here."

They began to search for more tomahawks and found seven in one corner. This enabled them to guess that there were eight members in

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the redshirts' group. This seemed to be their secret arsenal. It was Csónakos's first impulse to take the tomahawks as war booty.

"No," said Boka, "we'll do nothing of the kind. That would be plain stealing."

Csónakos was abashed.

"Now will you say something, daddykin!" chided Nemecsek with a sudden spurt of audacity, but he quickly subsided at a nudge from Boka, who said:

"Let's waste no time, but crawl out of here back to the hilltop! I don't want to reach the island when no one is there."

This daring prospect inspired them to greater zest. They scattered the tomahawks all over the chamber, just to make it evident that someone had been there. Then they squeezed through the crevice and, with courage replenished, hurried toward the top of the hill, whence one could see far and wide. Up there they stopped, standing close together, and gazed about. Boka took a small packet from a pocket. He unwrapped the newspaper around it and revealed a pearl-handled binocular.

"These opera glasses belong to Csele's sister," he said, and looked through them. But it was easy enough to sight the little island with the

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naked eye. Around it was the shimmering lagoon, in which were cultivated all manner of aquatic plants, and the banks of which were dense with sedge and reed. Deep among the trees on the island a tiny dot of light was discernible, at the discovery of which the boys grew serious.

"There they are," said Csónakos in a hoarse whisper.

Nemecsek seemed fascinated by the light, for he said:

"Gee, they have a lantern, too!"

The glistening dot waggled all over the island, vanishing and reappearing behind bushes and trees. Some one was shifting the lantern hither and thither.

"I have an idea," said Boka, who did not for a moment take his eye from the telescope, "that they're getting ready for something. It is either their evening drill . . . or . . ."

He suddenly became silent.

"Well?" insisted the other two anxiously.

"Good Lord," said Boka, still gazing through his glasses, "that boy who is carrying the lantern . . . why, that's . . ."

"Go on! Who is it?"

"Some one very familiar . . . only I don't . . ."

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He stepped higher to get a better glimpse, but just then the lantern light disappeared behind a bush. Boka removed the telescope.

"Vanished," he quietly said.

"But who was it?"

"I can't tell you. I didn't get a good look and just as I was about to see him more clearly, he got out of sight. I don't want to cast suspicion on anybody until I am quite sure. . . ."

"Surely it wasn't any one of our boys?"

There was sadness in the president's reply:

"I believe it was."

"Why, that's treason!" cried Csónakos, forgetting for the moment the need for discretion.

"Be quiet! When we get there we'll know everything. Until then you'll have to be patient."

Of course, they were now impelled also by curiosity. Boka refused to say whom the lanterned figure had resembled. They tried to guess, but Boka forbade this pastime, too, cautioning them against suspecting anyone. In great excitement they hurried down the hill, then continued their way on all-fours through the grass. They no longer paid heed to the thorns, nettles and pebbles which scratched their hands. They hurried, silently creeping closer

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and closer to the mysterious banks of the lagoon.

Finally they arrived. Now they were able to stand up, for the bushes and bulrushes were so tall that their diminutive figures were concealed. Boka was quite cool as he issued his orders.

"There must be a skiff somewhere near here. Nemecsek and I will scout around to the right, while you, Csónakos, will look for the boat along the left bank. The one who finds it will wait there for the others."

Off they went in silence. But they had hardly gone a few paces when Boka came upon the skiff among some sedge.

"Let's wait here," he whispered.

They waited for Csónakos to circle the entire lagoon to get back to them. Meanwhile they sat down on the embankment, gazing at the stars; then they listened keenly for possible sounds of conversation from the island. Nemecsek was determined to do something smart.

"I say," he said, "suppose I put my ear to the ground?"

"Never mind your ear," said Boka. "Much good it would do you here on this embankment. But we might get an earful by listening close to the surface of the water. I've seen fishermen along the Danube gabbing clear across the river

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by bending over the water. It carries the voice particularly well at night."

And they bent over the water, but could make out nothing quite intelligible. Meanwhile Csónakos arrived, sadly reporting: "There's not a skiff anywhere."

"Don't you worry, daddykin," spoke up Nemecsek consolingly, "we've found one."

Thereupon they made down the incline for the boat:

"Are we going to get in?"

"Not here," said Boka. "First we'll drag the boat over to the bank directly across the bridge, so as to be far enough away in case they see us. We'll row across at a point farthest away from the bridge. That will give them plenty of running space if they should want to chase after us."

This astuteness appealed strongly to the other two. It filled them with courage to know that their chief was such a nimble-witted fellow. Now the chief spoke up again:

"Who's got a piece of cord?"

Csónakos had it. His pockets were literally filled. No bazaar was better supplied with all sorts of things than the pockets of Csónakos. There you could have your choice of jackknife, twine, aggies, nails, keys, brass door-knobs, rags,

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notebooks, corkscrews, and Heaven knows what not. Csónakos drew forth a piece of string, which Boka fastened to the iron ring in the nose of the boat. With the aid of this they began cautiously to tow the skiff toward the opposite side of the island, keeping a sharp lookout at the same time for signs of life on the island. Upon arriving at the spot where they intended to enter the rickety contraption, the sound of the whistle they had heard before struck their ears. But it did not frighten them this time. They knew it merely meant that the guards were being changed on the bridge. Their timidity had diminished all the more, as they felt themselves to be involved in battle. This holds equally true of real soldiers in real combat. Before meeting the foe, they usually shrink back from the slightest sound. But after the first shot has passed over their heads, they pluck up courage and often actually become drunk with it, forgetting that they are rushing headlong toward death.

The boys got into the boat. Boka entered first, followed by Csónakos. Nemecsek timorously paced up and down the muddy embankment.

"Come on in, daddykin," said Csónakos encouragingly.

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"I'm coming," said Nemecsek and, in the excitement, lost his balance. Aghast, he clutched at a slender reed stalk and, without another sound, fell into the water. He was soured to the neck, but dared not utter a sound. He quickly stood up in the shallow lagoon, cutting a sorry little figure with the water dripping from his clothes and the absurdly thin reed stalk convulsively held in his hand.

Csónakos could not restrain his mirth; he blurted out: "Did you have a drink, daddykin?"

"I did not," retorted the blond little fellow, his face betraying fright. He was wringing wet and muddy as he slid into the boat—and pale with alarm.

"I had no idea I'd get a bath today," he quietly remarked.

But there was no time to be lost. Boka and Csónakos gripped the oars and pushed the skiff away from the bank. It was a heavy craft and yielded only lazily, ruffling the quiet lagoon in the attempt. Noiselessly the oars were dipping in and out of the water and the silence was so great that they clearly heard the sound of chattering teeth—those of little Nemecsek, who was huddled in the nose of the skiff. In a few minutes the boat glided onto the bank. The boys

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swiftly got out and immediately hid themselves behind a bush.

"That's that," said Boka, and began stealthily to crawl along the bank. The others followed.

"Hold on there," said the chief, turning back, "We can't leave the boat behind. If they find it, we'll be stuck here on the island. There are guards on the bridge, you know. You, Csónakos, stay here with the boat. If anybody discovers it, stick your fingers into your mouth and whistle for dear life. We'll rush back, jump into the boat and you'll shove off."

Csónakos slouched back to the skiff and secretly felt elated over the prospect of whistling—as only he knew how. . . .

Boka and the little fellow proceeded along the bank. Wherever the bushes were tall, they stood up and quietly strode on. Presently they stopped at one such tall bush. Here they pushed the foliage aside and had an unobstructed glimpse of the middle of the island, where there was a clearing, with the dread army of red-shirts in full view. Nemecsek's heart began to palpitate. He drew closer to Boka.

"Don't be afraid," said his chief.

In the middle of the clearing there was a big rock, upon it a lantern. Squatted around the

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lantern were the red-shirts. Their blouses really were red. Crouching alongside of Feri Áts were the two Pásztor boys; close beside the younger of these was someone without a red gym blouse. . . .

Boka felt a quiver run through Nemescek.

"Say . . ." said Nemescek, but the words stuck in his throat . . . "say . . . say. . . ." Then he managed to add: "You see what I see?"

"Yes," said Boka, sick at heart.

It was Geréb whom they had seen squatting beside the red-shirts. So, Boka had not been mistaken in his earlier surmise. It was Geréb whom he had seen, from the hilltop, carrying a lantern about. Now he and Nemescek watched the red-bloused troop with redoubled vigilance. The lantern cast a weird shadow over the swarthy faces of the Pásztor boys and over the red shirts of the rest. All of them were silent, only Geréb was speaking in an undertone. He must have been relating something of utmost interest to all, for their heads were close together, listening intently. In the great silence of the night even the two Paul Street boys heard Geréb's words. He was saying:

"There are two ways of getting into the *grund*. . . . One entrance is on Paul Street, but

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that's not so easy because the rules are that anyone entering must bolt the gate behind him. The other is by way of Maria Street. There the sawmill gate is always wide open. From there you can get to the *grund* by sneaking through the woodpiles. The only hard thing about this is that there are fortresses in the alleys among the woodpiles. . . ."

"I know," interjected Feri Áts in a deep tone that sent a shiver through the Paul Street lads.

"I guess you do because you were there," resumed Geréb. "And there are guards in the fortresses, you know. They'd quickly give the signal, if they saw anybody prowling among the woodpiles. I think you'd better not try to get in that way. . . ."

So, that was it! The redshirts were to invade the *grund*. . . .

Geréb continued to talk: "It might be a good idea to talk things over before you come there. I'll make it my business to enter last on the day you pick and I'll leave the gate open. I won't bolt it."

"Very good," said Feri Áts. "I wouldn't for the world want to capture the place when there is nobody about. It's going to be a perfectly regular war. If they can defend the *grund*, well

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and good. If not, we'll capture it and put up our red flag. We're not doing it out of greediness—you know right well. . . ."

One of the Pásztor boys spoke up: "We're doing it so as to have our own ball-grounds. We can't play here, and over on Eszterházy Street we always have to fight for a place. . . . We've got to have a ball-ground. That's all there's to it!"

Thus, their motives for war were exactly the same as those which make real soldiers fight. The Russians needed sea space, so they waged war against the Japanese. The redshirts needed ball-playing space and, having no other alternative, set out to acquire it by war.

"Well, then, it's understood," said the chieftain of the redshirts, "that you, Geréb, will forget to bolt the Paul Street gate."

"Righto!" Geréb replied.

Poor sandy Nemecsek! His heart was filled with anguish by now. There he stood, drenched to the skin, staring at those around the fire, including the traitor. So sharp was the pain in his heart that when Geréb uttered the "Righto" indicative of his readiness to betray the *grund*, he burst into tears. He put his arms around

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Boka's neck and, softly weeping, said: "Oh, chief . . . oh, chief . . . oh, chief. . . ."

Boka gently disengaged himself, saying: "This is no time for tears." But there was a lump in his own throat, too. Geréb's act was most disheartening.

Suddenly, at the command of Feri Áts, the redshirts stood up.

"We'll all go home now," said their chief. "Have you got your weapons?"

"Yes," they replied in unison and picked up their long wooden spears, at the tips of which were tiny red buntings.

"Forward!" commanded Feri Áts. "Get into the bushes and stack arms."

Off they went, with Feri Áts at their head, farther inland. Geréb went with them. The little clearing remained vacant, except for the rock and the burning lantern upon it. Receding footsteps were heard, as the redshirts invaded the thicket in order to hide their spears.

Boka began to stir.

"Now," he whispered to Nemecsek and reached into his pocket. He pulled out the red sheet of paper, into which he had stuck a thumb tack. Pushing aside the foliage behind which

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they were hidden, he said to his blond companion: "You wait here. Don't budge!"

With that he leapt into the clearing where only a moment ago the redshirts had gathered. Nemecsek watched him with bated breath. Boka's first move was to get close to the big tree at the edge of the clearing. Like a huge umbrella, the luxuriant foliage of the tree covered the island. In less than a second Boka stuck the red sheet of paper on the tree trunk and just as swiftly he darted to the lantern. Opening one of its panes, he blew out the flame of the candle. For a moment Nemecsek lost sight of Boka. But his eyes had not quite got accustomed to the darkness when he felt Boka's arm on his.

"Run after me as fast as you can!" Boka whispered, and they began to gallop toward the bank where their skiff had been left. Csónakos saw them coming and quickly jumped into the boat, leaning the oars against the bank so as to be ready to shove off at a moment's notice. The two lads fairly flew into the skiff.

"Let's go," panted Boka.

Csónakos found it difficult to budge the boat, for the skiff had been so rapidly propelled prior to their arrival that it virtually glided out of the water when they landed. Someone now had to

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step out to raise its prow and push it into the water. But now voices were heard again coming from the clearing. The redshirts had returned from their arsenal and found the lantern extinguished. At first they thought it had been snuffed out by the wind, but soon Feri Áts discovered that one of the panes was open.

"Somebody was here!" he bellowed, so loud that even the boys struggling with the skiff heard it.

Someone quickly lighted the lantern, by the glow of which they espied the crimson note on the tree: THE PAUL STREET BOYS WERE HERE! The redshirts were puzzled. Feri Áts yelled:

"Well, if they were here, they must still be around! After them!"

He whistled loud and shrill. The sentinels on the bridge hurried forward to report that no one could have entered that way.

"They came by boat," said the younger Pásztor boy.

And the three lads, still struggling with the boat, were terrified at the sound of the sharp "After them!"

At that very instant Csónakos succeeded in shoving off and jumping into the boat. All of

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them grabbed oars and rowed shoreward with all their might. Feri Áts was heard roaring commands:

"Wendauer, you get up on the tree. Keep a sharp eye on them! The two Pásztors will cross the bridge, and go circling along both banks of the lagoon!"

It seemed as if our trio of Paul Streeters were doomed to be completely surrounded. They felt that their paddling, no matter how swift, could not overcome the sprinting prowess of the fleet-footed Pásztor boys. There was no escape in either direction. Even if they should be fortunate enough to reach land before the Pásztors overtook them, they could not hope to evade the lookout on the tree. Rowing as fast as they could, they saw Feri Áts, a lantern in his hand, running up and down the bank. Then they heard the tramping of feet: the Pásztors had just crossed the bridge. . . . But luck was with the Paul Street boys. By the time the redshirts' lookout climbed to the top of the tree, their boat reached shore.

"Their boat has just landed!" screamed a voice in the tree. And the chieftain's stentorian voice quickly responded: "Get after them! All of you!"

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But the Paul Street boys now ran breathlessly.

"They mustn't overtake us," muttered Boka while running. "We'd be greatly outnumbered!"

On and on they scampered over lawns and roads, Boka first and the others directly behind him. They made straight for the glass-roofed conservatory.

"Get into the glass house!" panted Boka, as he dashed toward a small door leading into the conservatory. Happily, this door was open. They darted in and hid behind some tall cypress trees. Outside all was silent. The pursuers seemed to have been thrown off their scent.

The three little fellows now thought it wise to rest a bit. They gazed about the curious interior of the place, through the glass walls and roof of which the dim glow of an urban evening filtered. It was oddly fascinating, this huge glass house. The boys were in the left wing. Beyond that was the central edifice, then the right wing. Throughout the length of the house, in large green wooden tubs, gigantic trees reared their heads. In oblong boxes were mimosas and ferns. Under the dome of the center house stood tall fan-leaved palms, surrounded by a veritable forest of tropical vegetation. In

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the very heart of this forest was a pool of goldfish, beside it a bench. Then magnolias, laurels, orange trees, and giant ferns. All of them pungent, filling the air with a spicy odor. And there was a constant drip-drip of water in this vast steam-heated chamber. The boys heard the thud of these drops against the big fleshy leaves. The rustling of the palm leaves conjured queer tropical beasts in their minds; they fancied seeing beasts slinking about among the tubs in this damp and warm miniature jungle. But on the whole they felt rather secure, and began to wonder just how soon they would be free to leave the place.

"I only hope they don't shut us in here," whispered Nemecek who, exhausted, sat under a palm tree and, being drenched as he was, felt a glowing sensation in the warmth of the place.

Boka reassured him.

"If they didn't close the place till now, they're not likely to do so after this."

And so they continued to sit and listen. There was not a sound. It occurred to no one to look for them in there. Presently they rose and began prowling about among the tall shelvings that were crowded with tiny green shrubs, scented herbs and big flowers. Csónakos

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bumped into one of these. Nemecsek was eager to be of service.

"Hold on, there," he said, "I'll get a light."

And before Boka had a chance to prevent it, Nemecsek lit a match. But it merely flared up, for the next moment Boka knocked it out of the sandy lad's fingers.

"You monkey, you!" he said in anger. "Have you forgotten that you are in a glass house?! Why, the very walls of the place are made of glass. . . . I'll bet they saw the light!"

They stopped to listen. Sure enough, Boka was right. The redshirts had noticed the flare of Nemecsek's match, which for a moment had illuminated the entire glass chamber. The next minute the enemies' footsteps were heard over the gravel pathway. The redshirts, too, made for the left wing door. The Paul Streeters heard Feri Áts turn into war lord again.

"Pásztor boys to the small door on the right," he cried. "Szebenics watch the center door, and I'll stay here!"

The Paul Street boys quickly found hiding places. Csónakos lay flat under a shelf. On the plea that he was wet anyway, they persuaded Nemecsek to slip into the fish pool. The sandy little fellow was in water up to his chin and con-

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cealed his head under a spreading fern leaf. Boka merely had time enough to step behind the opening door.

Feri Áts and his escort marched in. He held a lantern aloft. The light of it fell in a manner to reveal its holder, but the latter could not see Boka behind the door. Boka took a good look at the redshirt chief. Only once before had he seen him—in the Museum Garden. Feri Áts impressed Boka as a decidedly handsome lad whose eyes were now aglow with the fervor of battle. But he soon vanished. Together with the other redshirts, he scoured the place; in the right wing they even peeped under the shelves. No one thought of searching the pool. Csónakos had a narrow escape. One of the boys was on the verge of looking under the shelf that was sheltering him, but just then Szebenics happened to say:

"They must have skipped out through the right door. . . ."

And since Szebenics immediately headed in that direction, in their excitement the others followed suit. They galloped through the glass-house and several dull thuds indicated that they, too, were not overly considerate of the flower

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pots. Then they departed, and silence reigned again. Csónakos crawled forth.

"Daddykin," he said, "a pot fell on my head. I'm full of earth. . . ." Diligently he spat out the sand with which his nose and mouth were filled. Next to emerge, like some aquatic monster, was Nemecsek. The poor soul was wringing wet again and, as was his wont, there came a whimpering note into his plaintive voice.

"Am I going to stay in water all my life? What am I, anyway? A frog?"

He shook himself like a drenched poodle.

"Quit your snivelling," said Boka. "Let's be going now. High time to put an end to this night. . . ."

Nemecsek sighed:

"Gee, I'd love to be home already." But he suddenly realized the sort of reception there would be in store for him at the sight of his wet clothes. So he modified his wish: "I really don't care much when I get home!"

They ran back toward the acacia trees where they had come in across the rickety fence. It took them only a few minutes to get there. Csónakos climbed up the tree again, but before stepping on top of the fence he looked back into the garden. Panic-stricken, he cried:

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"There they come!"

"Back to the tree!" ordered Boka.

Csónakos climbed up into the tree and helped his companions to follow him. They rose as high as they could with safety. It annoyed them to think that they might be caught just as they were about to escape.

The redshirts arrived in strident confusion at the tree. The Paul Street boys sat mutely, like three big grim birds, among the foliage. . . .

Szebenics, who in the glass house had thrown his own gang off the right track, now spoke up:

"I saw them jump across the fence!"

He seemed to be the most stupid of the enemy's outfit. And, since it is usually the most moronic who are loudest, it was Szebenics who made the most noise. The redshirts, who were trained gymnasts, quickly scaled the fence. Feri Áts was last to leave and, before climbing over, he blew out the light. In mounting the fence he enlisted the aid of the same acacia tree in which the three Paul Street birds were roosting. In fact, some of the copious drops dripping from Nemeček, like from eaves in need of repair, fell upon his neck.

"It's raining," cried Feri Áts, wiped his neck and jumped off into the street.

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"There they go!" sounded the alarm from the street as they began to run; evidently Szebenics had blundered again. Boka was moved to remark:

"If not for that fellow Szebenics, we'd have fallen into their clutches long ago. . . ."

For the first time they felt definitely beyond the reach of the redshirts. They saw them chasing two unsuspecting boys up a narrow street. They also saw these lads frightened into running madly before the menacing redshirts. The uproar subsided only in the distance, in an alley somewhere in the Josephtown section.

Our trio of fugitives climbed off the fence and sighed with relief upon feeling the pavement under their feet again. An old woman hobbled by, followed by other pedestrians. The boys experienced an increasing sense of security. They were tired and hungry. In the nearby orphan asylum, whose windows shone encouragingly into the night, a dinner gong was heard.

Nemecsek was shivering.

"Let's hurry," he pleaded.

"Wait a minute," said Boka. "Here is some money. You'd better go home by tram."

He reached into a pocket, but his hand remained stuck. The president of the Paul Street

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Boys found only three coppers and an elegant fountain pen, gaily leaking. He fished out the three ink-stained coins and handed them to Nemecsek:

"This is all I have."

Csónakos also happened to have two coppers. To all of this was added Nemecsek's own lucky penny, which he kept in a small box. With a total of six pennies, the shivering lad boarded a horse tram.

Boka stopped for a while. His heart was still full of Geréb's infamy. He stood there, sad and silent. But Csónakos knew nothing as yet about Geréb's treachery; and so he was rather cheery.

"Watch me, daddykin!" he said and, as Boka turned to look, he stuck two fingers into his mouth and whistled with all his might; it was loud enough to burst one's eardrums. Then he gazed about contentedly, as if thoroughly sated by that single blast.

"I've been saving up for this all evening," he said hilariously. "But I couldn't hold it any longer, daddykin!"

He slipped an arm into Boka's and, exhausted by their hectic experiences, they jogged off along Üllői Avenue toward the city. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

The clock in the classroom struck one again, and the boys grabbed their books. Professor RácZ slammed his book shut and rose on the rostrum. Little Csengey, first row first, obligingly jumped up to help the professor put on his topcoat. The Paul Streeters from various seats knowingly glanced at each other, awaiting instructions by Boka. They already knew that this afternoon the meeting on the *grund* would take place at two o'clock, for the scouting party of three was scheduled to present a report of its exploits in the Botanical Gardens. Enough had leaked out to assure the boys that the excursion had been successful and that the chief of the Paul Street boys boldly returned the call of the redshirts. But all of them were curious to know details, highlights of the perilous adventure. Not with

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a pair of pincers could you have extracted a word from Boka. Csónakos, on the other hand, babbled a good deal and—may Heaven forgive him—indulged in all sorts of fibbing. He even hinted at certain wild animals which they had encountered among the ruins in the Botanical Gardens. . . . He said that Nemecsek nearly drowned in the pool . . . that the redshirts sat around a frightfully burning stake. . . . It was a jumbled story he told, omitting all that was really important. Nor could anyone listen to him for any length of time, because he almost deafened his hearers with frequent interruptions of whistling. These he employed in place of periods and other punctuations.

Nemecsek, on the other hand, regarded his own rôle as so vital that he very gravely lapsed into taciturnity. If pressed for information, he would say:

"I cannot say anything." Or: "Ask the chief."

The others were terribly envious of Nemecsek who, though a private, had been privileged to figure so prominently in such a magnificent adventure. All the first- and second-lieutenants felt that henceforth their prestige would be dwarfed by that of this mere private. More-

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over, many of them expressed the conviction that the blond little fellow would soon be promoted, which would leave only one other private—Hector, the watchman's black dog. . . .

Even before Professor Rácz left the classroom, Boka raised two fingers to convey to the Paul Street boys that the meeting would be held at two o'clock. Those of the class who were not members of the gang felt genuinely jealous when, at the signal from Boka, all the Paul Streeters saluted in acknowledgment of their chief's orders.

The entire class was about to disperse when something unexpected happened. Professor Rácz suddenly stopped on the steps leading to his rostrum.

"All of you wait," he said.

Deep silence ensued.

Out of his coat pocket the professor drew a slip of paper, adjusted his spectacles and began to read the following names:

"Weisz!"

"Present," responded Weisz in alarm.

The professor continued to call:

"Richter! Csele! Kolnay! Barabás! Leszik! Nemecsek!"

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All of them duly indicated their presence. Professor Rácz pocketed the note and said:

"You boys will not go home now, but will follow me to the teachers' room. There is something I want to talk to you about."

With that he hurried out of the classroom without explaining the cause of his odd invitation.

Great and loud was the commotion that followed.

"Wonder why he calls us?"

"What does he want with us?"

"Why must we stay?"

Such were the questions heard in the hubbub. And, since all the invited ones were Paul Streeters, they gathered around Boka.

"I haven't the slightest idea what it's all about," said their president. "Just do as you were told. I'll wait for you boys in the corridor."

Then he turned to the others, saying:

"I guess we'll have to postpone our meeting until three o'clock—because of unforeseen interference."

The main corridor of the school was teeming with boys. The rest of the classes, too, poured out their allotment. Turmoil, haste and a

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shuffling of feet reigned throughout the huge-windowed, otherwise quiet, corridor. Everyone was in a hurry.

"What's the matter? Are you boys going to the tardy room?" said one lad, addressing himself to a dejected group darkling at the door of the teachers' room.

"I should say not," Weisz proudly replied.

The boy ran away, the others following him with envious eyes. . . .

After a few minutes of waiting the door opened and, behind the glazed window, there appeared the tall gaunt figure of Professor Rácz.

"Come in, boys," he said and led the way.

The room was empty. The boys gathered around a long green table, and stood in deathly silence. The last one to enter respectfully closed the door. Professor Rácz took his seat at the head of the table and looked about.

"Are you all here?"

"Yes, sir."

The blissful clatter of boys homeward bound floated up from the yard below. Professor Rácz ordered the window closed, whereupon the silence in the vast book-lined room became omi-

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nous. In this funereal atmosphere Professor Rácz said:

"I understand that you boys have formed some sort of a club. I am told that it is called the Putty Club or something like that. The one who told me has also given me the membership list. You are the members. Am I right?"

No one replied. All hung their heads and stood in silence as a token of their admission.

The professor resumed his indictment:

"But let's go about this in the proper sequence. First of all I want to know who founded the club—because you know how explicitly I forbade the forming of any kind of a club. Now, then, who did it?"

Continued silence. Then a timid voice:

"It was Weisz!"

Professor Rácz looked at Weisz sternly:

"Weisz! Can't you speak up for yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I can."

"Then why didn't you?"

Poor Weisz did not know what to say. Professor Rácz lit a cigar and blew puffs of smoke in the air.

"Very well. Let us go on," he said. "Suppose you first tell me what putty is?"

In reply Weisz produced from a pocket a big

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ball and placed it on the table. For a while he gazed at it, then in an almost inaudible tone he declared:

"That's putty."

"And what might that be?" the professor inquired.

"That's a sort of paste used by glaziers to fasten window panes. The glazier smears it on and we scrape it off with our finger-nails."

"And did you scrape this together?"

"No, sir. This is club property."

The professor's eyes grew wider:

"How is that?"

Weisz became somewhat bolder as he explained:

"This, you see, sir, was collected by all the members and the executive board appointed me official custodian. Before that it was in charge of Kolnay, who was also treasurer. But he let it dry up. He never chewed on it."

"Is that what is done?"

"Yes, sir. Otherwise it would become hard and then we couldn't squeeze it any more. I used to chew it every day."

"Why you?"

"Because it says in the bylaws that the presi-

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dent has to chew the club putty at least once a day, to keep it from drying up. . . .”

Here Weisz burst into tears. Whimpering he added:

“And I’m the president now. . . .”

The atmosphere was tense. The professor sternly said:

“Where did you all gather enough for this big ball?”

More silence. The professor looked at Kolnay:

“Kolnay, where did you get it?”

Kolnay sputtered his reply, as if anxious to help matters by a frank confession:

“You see, sir, we’ve had this a month already. I did the chewing for a week, but it was smaller then. The first piece was got by Weisz. That’s when we organized the club. One day he went riding with his father and scraped the putty off the carriage windows. It made his fingers bleed. Soon after that the window in the auditorium broke and I went there and waited all afternoon till the glazier came. I spoke to him—asked him for some putty, but he didn’t answer. He couldn’t answer because his beak was full of putty.”

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The professor was shocked into wrinkling his eyebrows.

"What sort of talk is this? Only birds have beaks!"

"Well, then, his mouth was full. He was chewing it, too. Then I asked him to let me watch him fix the window. He winked that it was OK with him. And so I watched until he finished the job and went away. After he was gone, I scraped the putty off and took it away. But I wasn't stealing it for myself . . . it was for the club . . . for the . . . cl-uh-uh-uh-b. . . ."

He, too, was crying.

"Don't cry," said Professor Rácz.

Weisz was plucking at his lapels and, in his embarrassment, found it necessary to observe:

"He bawls for the least little thing. . . ."

But Kolnay went on, sobbing heart-rendingly. Weisz whispered to him:

"Quit your bawling!" And he, too, burst into tears.

This wholesale blubbering moved Professor Rácz to sympathy. He puffed at his cigar uneasily. Now Csele, dapper little Csele, stepped out of line and proudly walked up to the professor. He was resolved to prove to be as stead-

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fastly Roman as had been Boka on the *grund* some days ago. He spoke resolutely:

"Sir, I brought the club some putty, too." Proudly he met the professor's look. The latter ventured to ask:

"Where from?"

"From home," Csele replied. "I broke the bird's bath-tub. Mother had it repaired and I picked off the putty right away. Of course, all the water leaked out when the canary was getting its bath. But why should these birds be given baths? Look at the sparrows. They never bathe, yet they're not dirty."

Professor Rácz leaned forward in his chair. Ominously he said:

"You're much too flippant today, but I'll take care of you! Kolnay, continue where you left off!"

Kolnay was still whimpering and snivelling. He wiped his nose:

"What am I to continue?"

"Where did the rest of the putty come from?"

"Why, Csele just told you. . . . And the club once gave me sixty *krajcárs* to buy some."

This did not at all appeal to Professor Rácz's sense of humor.

"So you bought some for money, eh?"

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"No, sir," said Kolnay. "My dad is a doctor and every morning rides by cab to call on his patients. One day he took me along and I scraped some putty off the cab windows. It was real soft putty. The club decided to give me six ten-penny coins to ride around in the same cab. I did it that same afternoon. I rode to the end of the city and got all the putty from the four windows . . . then I walked home."

The professor seemed to recall the incident:

"It must have been the day I met you near the Ludovican Officers' Training College."

"Yes, sir."

"I even spoke to you . . . but you didn't answer me."

Kolnay bowed his head and mournfully explained:

"I couldn't . . . my mug was full of putty."

Again their light went out. Kolnay began to weep afresh, Weisz became excited and plucked the edges of his jacket and, in his embarrassment, repeated:

"He always bawls. . . ." He himself was equally tearful.

The professor rose and paced up and down the room. Shaking his head, he said:

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"A lovely little club. And who was the president?"

"I was."

"Who was the treasurer?"

"Kolnay."

"Hand over all the money that's left."

"Here you are, sir," said Kolnay, as he reached into a pocket which was as spacious as Csónakos's. After some fumbling, he placed on the table everything it contained. First of all he produced a *forint* and forty-three *krajcárs* (1.43). Then came two five-penny postage stamps, a sealable postal card, two revenue stamps, eight brand new pen-points and a colored agate. The professor counted the money and his face grew serious.

"Where did you get the money?"

"From dues. We've been paying ten pennies a week."

"And what was the money for?"

"Just to be in good standing. Weisz refused to take his presidential salary."

"How much was that?"

"Five pennies a week. I brought the postage stamps, Barabás the card, and Richter the revenue stamps. His father is. . ."

The professor interrupted:

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"He stole them, didn't he? Richter!"

Richter came forward with drooping eyes.

"Did you steal them?"

Richter nodded. Professor Rácz shook his head:

"What depravity! What does your father do?"

"He is Dr. Ernő Richter, counsellor-at-law and notary. But the club made it good."

"How so?"

"It was like this. I stole the stamps from papa and, because I was afraid, the club gave me a crown to buy another stamp, which I sneaked back on dad's desk. And he caught me in the act—not when I was stealing it but when I was putting it back . . . and he . . . I got it in the neck. . . ."

At a severe look from the professor, Richter corrected himself by saying: "He gave me a beating and slapped my face because I put it back, and he asked me where I got it but I didn't want to tell him. That's when I got a few extra slaps. Then I said that Kolnay gave it to me and he said 'Give it back to him instantly, for he, too, must have stolen it somewhere.' And I took it back to Kolnay. That's why the club now has two stamps."

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It set Professor Rácz thinking.

"But why did you buy a new stamp, when you could have returned the old one?"

"No, sir, we couldn't," spoke up Kolnay, "because the club's seal had been stamped on the back already."

"So you have a seal, too? Where is it?"

"Barabás is guardian of the seal."

Now it was Barabás's turn to step forth. He cast murderous glances at Kolnay, with whom he had always been at odds. He had a vivid recollection of the hat affair on the *grund*. . . . But he saw no way out, so he quietly placed the rubber stamp on the green professorial table; also the tin-covered ink pad. The professor scrutinized the seal. Engraved on it were the words: "Putty Collectors Club, Budapest. Founded 1889".

Professor Rácz repressed a chuckle and shook his head again. Encouraged by this attitude, Barabás reached out to take back the rubber stamp. But the professor intercepted him.

"What are you up to?"

"Sir," Barabás blurted out, "I swore to defend the seal with my life, rather than give it up."

The professor thrust the stamp into his own pocket.

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"Silence!" he said.

But Barabás would not be silenced:

"In that case," said he, "you'd also better take the flag away from Csele."

"So, there is a flag, too? Let's have it," said the professor, turning to Csele, who, thereupon, reached into his pocket and pulled out a tiny bunting fastened to a piece of wire. Not unlike the *grund* flag, this, too, had been made by his sister. But this one was red, white and green and carried the legend: "Putty Collectors Club, Budapest. Founded 1889. We solemnly swear to be free forever."

"Hm," said the professor. "Whose bright idea was it to spell *solemnly* without an *n*? Who was it?"

No one answered. Professor Rácz thundered the question again: "Who did it?"

Csele quickly thought of a loophole. Why should he, he reflected, get the boys into trouble? True, it was Barabás who misspelled the word, but why should he be made to suffer? Therefore, he blandly remarked:

"My sister wrote it, sir."

He swallowed hard after that. It may not have been quite fair of him, but it helped pull his pal out of a predicament. . . . The profes-

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sor made no comment. And now all the boys became confusedly talkative.

"I don't think it was a bit fair for Barabás to betray the flag," observed Kolnay angrily.

Barabás, protesting his innocence, said:

"He is always picking on me! After the seal was taken away from me, the club was as good as dead anyway."

"Silence!" from Professor Rácz put an end to the argument. "I'll fix you boys. I hereby declare the club disbanded, and don't let me hear of anyone having a hand in such things again. Rest assured, your deportment will be duly considered in your marks. Weisz will fare even worse, because he was the ringleader."

"Pardon me, sir," ventured Weisz, "but this was my last day as president of the club. Our general meeting, which was called for today, had planned to elect somebody else for the month."

"Yes, Kolnay was nominated," said Barabás, grinning.

"That is all the same to me," remarked the professor. "Tomorrow all of you will remain here until two o'clock. I'll put a stop to this monkey business. And now you may all leave!"

"Good day, sir!" said the boys in chorus and moved to depart. Weisz, taking advantage of

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this commotion, reached for the putty. But the professor noticed it:

"Keep your hands off that!"

Weisz looked sheepish:

"Won't you give it back to us?"

"No. Moreover, those of you who have some had better turn it in to me. I'll be very severe with anyone found to be holding on to the least bit of putty."

Thereupon Leszik, who had been as quiet as a carp, stepped forward. Out of his mouth he produced a piece of putty; with heavy heart and grimy fingers he pasted it to the club's lump on the table.

"Have you any more?"

In lieu of an answer, Leszik opened his mouth wide. It was quite empty. Professor Rácz took his hat:

"Don't ever dare to form a club again! Clear out now and go home!"

The boys slunk out in silence; only one of them spoke up.

"Good day, sir," said Leszik quietly, for his mouth had been full while the others were saying good-bye.

The professor was gone and the disrupted putty club remained alone. The boys glanced at

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one another pathetically. Kolnay was telling Boka what had happened. Boka breathed with relief.

"I was awfully scared," he said, "because I thought someone would squeal about the *grund*. . . ."

Meanwhile Nemecsek came forward and whispered:

"Look here . . . while he was quizzing you . . . I stood near the window . . . it was a new one . . . and. . . ."

He held up a fresh chunk of putty that he had scraped off the window. They all looked at him in awe. Weisz' eyes grew bright:

"Well now, since we have putty again, we also have a club! We'll hold our meeting on the *grund*, as planned."

"Yes, on the *grund*! On the *grund*!" shouted the others, and all of them began running homeward. The stairs re-echoed the watchword of the Paul Street Boys:

"Yo-ho! Ho! Yo-ho! Ho!"

And away they galloped through the gate. Boka alone went slowly. He was in no cheerful mood. His mind was filled with thoughts of Geréb, the traitor, who had carried a lantern on the island in the Botanical Gardens. Immersed

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in this disturbing thought, Boka went home, ate luncheon and tackled his Latin lessons for the morrow. . . .

Heaven only knows how they did it, but by half past two all members of the Putty Club were on the *grund*. Barabás came straight from home; he was still munching a big piece of bread rind. He waited for Kolnay at the gate in order to tweak him on the head. He had an extensive account to settle with Kolnay.

After all were gathered, Weisz led the way among the woodpiles.

"I declare the general meeting open," he said with grim seriousness.

Kolnay, who had by now repaid Barabás the tweak on the head, was of the opinion that—regardless of professorial injunction—the club ought to continue existence.

Barabás felt moved to voice certain suspicions:

"He is for it because it's his turn to be president. I say we've had enough of the Putty Club. You fellows become presidents one after another, while we keep chewing the putty in vain. I am disgusted with it. Can't I hope to have anything but this paste in my mouth?"

Nemecsek felt an urge to speak.

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"May I have the floor?" he said, addressing the chairman.

"Our secretary has asked for the floor," said Weisz in deadly earnest, after ringing a two-penny bell.

But Nemecsek's words seemed to stick in his throat. For just then he espied Geréb lurking among the woodpiles. No one among those present knew about Geréb that which he knew, that which it had been his privilege to witness with Boka on that momentous night. Geréb was stealthily heading for the Slovenian watchman's shack. Nemecsek felt it to be his bounden duty to keep an eye on the traitor, to watch his every step. Boka had said that, until he arrives, Geréb must not learn that he had been seen sitting among the redshirts on the island. Let him go on thinking that he was fooling everybody.

But now he was here, slinking about. Nemecsek longed to know, at any cost, just why Geréb went to see the watchman. Therefore he said aloud:

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman, but I prefer to make my speech at some later time. I have just thought of something I must do."

Weisz shook his bell again:

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"Our secretary desires to postpone his talk."

But the secretary was gone by now. He ran, not after but to head off, Geréb. He cut across the empty lot and emerged on Paul Street. Thence he turned into Maria Street and rushed, as if for dear life, toward the entrance of the sawmill. He was nearly run over by an enormous loaded van which happened to be lumbering out of the yard. The little chimney was puffing away, belching its white vapors. The sawmill within the hut was screeching in agony, as if to say:

"Waaatch ououout! Waaatch ououout!"

"You bet I'm watching out!" hurled Nemecek at it as he darted past the little house, down toward the woodpiles, and stopped directly behind the watchman's shack. The roof of this shack was of the sheltering kind, its edges reaching to the wood stacked just behind the house. Nemecek clambered up onto the woodpile and stretched out on his stomach. He peeped sideways, awaiting developments. What was Geréb after? Was it a strategic move by the redshirts? He was determined to hear the scheme, no matter what happened. What glory it would bring him! He would be ever so proud to have exposed this latest treachery!

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After a while he saw Geréb approaching cautiously, frequently glancing backward for fear of being followed. Only after he had felt fairly certain that there was no one behind him did he hurry on at a bolder pace. The watchman was calmly sitting on the bench in front of his shack, smoking out of a pipe the cigar butts which the boys used to bring him. Everybody was collecting cigar-ends for Janó.

Suddenly his dog jumped up, yelped once or twice and, quick to scent that some one familiar was about, lay down again. Geréb came quite close to Janó, so that the roof hid them completely from Nemecsek. But the little sandy youth grew bolder. As quietly as he could he crawled over to the roof. Here he lay flat and crept forward and upward in order to get above the door, over which he might venture to stick his head. Here and there a shingle would creak under his weight and at such moments the blood would freeze in the veins of little Nemecsek. . . . But he went on and, finally, cautiously stuck his head forward. Had the watchman or Geréb suddenly looked up at that moment, they might have been frightened considerably at the sight of Nemecsek's sagacious little head on the fringe of the roof, his alert eyes

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taking in everything that was transpiring in front of the shack.

Geréb, who had drawn quite near to the watchman, bade him a disarming "How are you, Janó?"

"Hello!" responded the Slovenian without removing the pipe from his mouth.

Geréb leaned forward:

"I've got a cigar for you, Janó!"

This was news enough to take the pipe out of his mouth. His eyes grew bright. It was not often Janó's good fortune to see a whole cigar. He usually got it after someone else had consumed the better part of it.

Geréb produced three cigars and stuck them into Janó's hand.

"Gee," mused Nemecsek, "a blamed lucky thing it is that I climbed up here. That boy is up to something, or he wouldn't start off with cigars."

And he overheard Geréb softly saying to the watchman:

"Come into the shack with me . . . I don't want to talk to you out here . . . I don't want to be seen . . . it's something very important. There are plenty more cigars where those come from!"

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And he drew forth a handful of cigars. Nemecsek shook his head, thinking:

"There is something phoney behind this, or he wouldn't be offering him all those cigars."

Of course, the watchman gladly went into the shack, followed by Geréb. Behind Geréb the dog shuffled in. Nemecsek was piqued.

"I guess I won't hear a thing now," he thought, "my best laid plans have gone up the flue. . . ."

And he felt very envious of the dog that could slip right in before the door was closed. Yes, even the door was closed now. Nemecsek recalled tales about witches who had turned princes into dogs—and he really would gladly have given ten, even twenty, of his choicest aggies for such transformation: to be able to change places with the black Hector. After all, he reflected, Hector and he were comrades-in-arms—fellow privates. . .

But instead of an iron-nosed witch there came to his aid an iron-toothed insect. The poor worm that once upon a time had bored through a board in the roof, so as to feed its family royally, had not the slightest notion how great a service it was destined to render the Paul Street Boys. Where wormeaten, the board was natu-

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rally thinner. Nemecsek placed his ear to it and listened intently. He heard muffled sounds and before long had the thrill of hearing clearly everything that was being said in the shack. Geréb spoke in an undertone, evidently afraid, even in this secluded place, that someone would overhear him. He said to the watchman:

"Janó, be sensible. You can get all the cigars you want. But you've got to do something for it."

Janó grumbled his query:

"What must I do?"

"All you've got to do is to chase the boys off the *grund*. Don't let them play ball here or carry off your lumber."

For some moments nothing more was heard. Nemecsek inferred that the watchman was thinking things over. Then his voice floated up again:

"I got to chase them out?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because others want to use the place. Those others are all rich boys . . . you'll have all the cigars you can take care of . . . even money. . . ."

That had its desired effect.

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"Money, too?" Janó asked.

"Yes. A whole *forint*."

The prospect of a *forint* won the watchman over completely.

"All right," he said, "we'll chase them away."

Then the snapping of the latch and the creaking of the door. Geréb stepped out of the shack. But by then Nemecsek was no longer on the roof. With the agility of a cat, he had climbed off and dashed, through the woodpiles, back toward the *grund*. He was terribly excited and felt that the fate of all the boys, the whole future of the *grund*, was in his hands. Espying the group from a distance, he shouted:

"Boka!"

But no one replied. Again he called:

"Boka! Mr. President!"

A voice called back:

"He is not here yet!"

Nemecsek whizzed on, like a gale; he must notify Boka without delay. Immediate action was called for—before they would be driven from their domain. As he was galloping past the outermost woodpile, he saw the Putty Club boys still in session. Weisz—as presiding officer—wore the same grim look and, as the little blond fellow rushed by him, he called out:

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"Yo-ho! Ho! Mr. Secretary!"

Nemecsek merely motioned, while still running, that he was not stopping.

"Mr. Secretary!" shouted Weisz after him and, in order to enhance his own dignity, violently rang the presidential bell.

"Have no time!" Nemecsek called back and ran on to find Boka at his home. At this Weisz saw fit to resort to extreme measures. In a rasping voice he called out:

"Private Nemecsek! Halt!"

This brooked no refusal, for Weisz was a lieutenant. . . . The little fellow was furious, but had to obey now that Weisz flaunted his rank. He snapped into attention and said:

"At your command, lieutenant!"

"Why," replied the head of the Putty Club, "we have just decided that from now on the Putty Club is to function as a secret organization. We have even chosen a new president."

All those present lustily cheered the name of the new president:

"Long live, Kolnay!"

Only Barabás had a leer on his face and said:

"Down with Kolnay!"

The chairman resumed:

"If you wish to retain your office as secretary,

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you will now join us in taking the oath of secrecy, for if Professor Rác finds out that. . . .”

At this very instant Nemecsek again saw Geréb slinking among the woodpiles. If Geréb escapes him now, everything will have been in vain. . . . It will mean the end of the fortresses . . . and the *grund*. . . . But if Boka could have a heart-to-heart talk with Geréb here, he might still prevail upon his finer senses. The little sandy youth was almost frantic with rage. He interrupted the chairman:

“Mr. Chairman . . . I haven’t any time . . . I must leave. . . .”

Weisz sternly inquired:

“Mr. Secretary, are you afraid? Does our worthy Secretary perhaps fear the consequences of a possible discovery?”

But Nemecsek was not paying any attention to him. His eyes were fixed on Geréb, who was hiding among the woodpiles, waiting for the boys to leave so as to be able to sneak out unobserved. . . . And the realization of this impelled Nemecsek, without mincing further words, to leave the Putty Club in the lurch. Holding the lapels of his jacket with one hand,

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he galloped like a tornado across the *grund* and dashed through the gate.

The general meeting was gripped by deep silence. In this grave-like atmosphere the chairman finally said, in a mournful tone:

"All of you have witnessed the behavior of Ernő Nemecek. I declare him to be a coward!"

"So he is!" rang out their approval.

Indeed, Kolnay went so far as to say:

"He is a traitor!"

Richter excitedly asked for the floor:

"I move that this cowardly traitor, who has deserted the club in its hour of need, be fired from office. Also that we expel him and enter in the secret minutes that he is a traitor!"

"Hurrah!" came from every throat, and in solemn silence the chairman announced his verdict:

"This general meeting declares Ernő Nemecek to be a cowardly traitor, deprives him of his office and expels him from membership. . . . Mr. Recording Secretary!"

"Yes, sir!" said Leszik.

"Note in your minutes that this meeting declares Ernő Nemecek to be a traitor . . . and enter his name in small letters."

A murmur ran through the gathering. Ac-

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cording to the bylaws, this was the extreme penalty. Many of the boys crowded around Leszik, who sat down on the ground and placed on his lap the composition book which was bought for a five-penny coin. In this were kept the minutes of the Putty Club. In big scrawled letters Leszik wrote:

"ernö nemecsek is a traitor!"

Thus did the Putty Club deprive Ernö Nemecek of his honor. . . .

And Ernö Nemecek or—if it is thus more pleasing—*ernö nemecsek* rushed on and on toward Kinizsi Street, where in a modest little dwelling lived Boka. He swung through the gate and there ran straight into Boka.

"Well, well!" said Boka, after recovering from the impact. "What are you doing here?"

Gasping and panting, Nemecek related his experiences and clutched Boka's jacket in order to make him hurry to the scene. And so together they ran back to the *grund*.

"Sure you heard and saw all that?" asked Boka in the course of their sprinting.

"Yes, I heard and saw it."

"And is Geréb still there?"

"If we hurry, we'll probably still catch him."

At the Municipal Clinic they had to stop, for

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poor Nemecsek began to cough. He leaned against the wall.

"Just you . . ." he insisted, "hurry ahead . . . I'll . . . I'll get my . . . coughing done."

And he coughed violently.

"I caught cold," he said to Boka, who did not budge, "out there in the Botanical Gardens. . . . Falling into the lagoon was not so bad, but when I had to keep mum in the pool in the glass house, it was awfully cool. I felt the chills run down my back."

Finally they veered into Paul Street. Just as they turned the corner, the *grund* gate was flung open. Geréb was making his exit in great haste. Nemecsek clutched Boka's arm:

"There he goes!"

Boka cupped his hand and, in a ringing voice that disturbed the quiet little street, blared forth:

"Geréb!"

Geréb stopped and turned around. At the sight of Boka he burst into boisterous laughter; and, guffawing thus, he ran away out toward the nearby square. This sardonic outburst rang harshly among the houses of Paul Street. Geréb had the laugh on them.

The two boys remained standing on the street

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corner, as if rooted to the spot. Geréb disappeared from their sight. They had a feeling that everything was lost. They did not say a word, but quietly went to the *grund* gate. From within came the sound of gay boyish laughter; the boys were playing ball. Then a ringing shout: those of the Putty Club cheering their newly elected president. . . . No one in there had any inkling as yet that this strip of land was probably no longer theirs; that they were going to be robbed of this piece of barren, knobby ground, this bit of moorland, sandwiched in between two houses, which to their juvenile souls represented untrammelled freedom; which in the morning was their American prairie, in the afternoon their Magyar Lowlands, in rain their sea, in the Winter their North Pole—in other words, a friend which played whatever rôle they demanded for the amusement of themselves.

"You see," remarked Nemecsek, "they don't know yet."

Boka drooped his head and murmured:

"I guess not."

Nemecsek had an abiding faith in Boka's shrewdness. He refused to give up hope while in the company of his smart, level-headed little

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friend. The first pangs of fear gripped him only upon seeing the first tear in Boka's eyes, and when he heard the chief—the chief himself—say in a sad, quivering voice:

“What'll we do now?”



CHAPTER FIVE

Two days later, on a Thursday, as night fell upon the Botanical Gardens, two sentinels on the island bridge shouldered their arms at the sight of an approaching dark figure.

"Salute!" cried one of them, then both guards raised aloft their silver-tipped spears, upon which were reflected the pallid moonbeams. The salute was intended for Feri Áts, chieftain of the redshirts, who then hurried across the bridge.

"Are they all here?" he inquired.

"Yes, Captain," replied one of the sentinels.

"Is Geréb here?"

"He was first to get here."

The chief saluted in silence, whereupon the guards again raised their spears overhead. This was their official military greeting.

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By now all the redshirts had gathered on the clearing. As Áts joined them, the older Pásztor boy cried out:

“Salute!”

And the many long tin-foiled spears rose in the air.

“We’ve got to hurry, boys,” said Feri Áts, after he had returned the salute. “I’ve been delayed a little, so let’s get busy. Light the lantern.”

It was against regulations to light the lantern before the chief arrived. The burning lantern always indicated that Feri Áts was on the island. The younger Pásztor lad quickly carried out instructions and the redshirted army squatted down around the flickering light. No one said a word; they waited for the chief to speak.

“Anything to report?” the latter asked.

Szebenics held up a hand.

“Well?”

“I beg to report, sir, that there seems to be missing from the arsenal that red and green flag which you, sir, had plundered from the Paul Streeters.”

The chief knitted his eyebrows:

“Any of the weapons gone?”

“No, sir. As officer in charge of the arsenal,

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I made an investigation in the ruins and found all the tomahawks and lances untouched. Everything is there except the little flag. Somebody stole it."

"Did you see any footprints?"

"Yes, sir. According to rules, I did last night as I've been doing every night. I scattered some fine sand over the floors of the ruins. This morning I discovered a tiny footprint leading from the crevice straight toward the corner where that flag was kept and back to the crevice. There I lost it, because the ground is hard and grassy."

"You say the footprint was small?"

"Very small, sir. Smaller than Wendauer's, who has the tiniest foot in our outfit."

"It must have been a stranger," opined the chief. "One of the Paul Street boys, most likely."

A murmur ran through the ranks of the red-shirts.

"I base the suspicion," continued Áts, "on the fact that anybody else would have carried off at least one of the arms. But this somebody took the flag only. I'll bet the Paul Streeters assigned somebody to steal back their banner. Geréb, maybe you know something about this?"

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Evidently Geréb was acting as permanent spy. He rose:

"Not a thing, sir."

"Very well, you may sit down. We'll get to the bottom of this. But let's first get through with business matters. You all know how humiliated we were the other day. While all of us were on the island, the enemy managed to stick a red sign on that tree. What's more, they were so clever that we couldn't catch them. We were chasing a couple of total strangers for quite a distance before we saw our mistake. Yes, that red sign brought much shame on us and we've got to get revenge. We also postponed our attack on the *grund* so as to give Geréb a chance to study the lay of the land. And so now we'll have Geréb give us his report, then we'll decide when to go to war."

He looked at Geréb:

"Geréb, stand up!"

Geréb rose again.

"Let's hear your report. What did you get done?"

"I . . . I . . ." said the lad, somewhat embarrassed, "it's my opinion that we may be able to capture the place without any battle. I've thought the thing over and realized that, after

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all, I used to be one of them . . . so why should I be the cause of . . . I mean . . . that is, I bribed the Slovenian watchman . . . he's going to drive them out . . . of. . . ."

The words stuck in his throat. So stern was the look shot at him by Áts that he couldn't go on. Then the chief spoke in his powerful, stentorian voice that had so often—when enraged—made the boys tremble:

"No," he bellowed, "you still don't seem to know the redshirts! We offer no bribes; nor do we bargain. If they won't give it up peaceably, we'll take it from them. No, damn it! I want no watchman and no driving out. What sort of underhanded business do you call this?"

All were silent and Geréb lowered his eyes. Feri Áts rose:

"If you're a coward, get to hell home!"

His eyes were flashing as he spoke and Geréb was dreadfully uneasy. He realized that if the redshirts now decided to oust him, there would be no room left for him in all the world. So he raised his head and strove to speak in a fearless manner:

"I am not a coward! I am with you! Heart and soul. I'm ready to pledge you my loyalty!"

"That's the stuff," said Áts, but his face belied

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the sympathy his words tried to convey. "If you wish to be with us, you'll take the oath on our laws."

"Gladly," he replied, and breathed more freely.

"Your hand on it." And they shook hands.

"From now on, you'll be a lieutenant among us. Szebenics will see that you are given a tomahawk and a spear, and he'll enter your name in the secret roster. And now listen to me. This thing cannot be put off any longer. Tomorrow I am going to decide on the day of attack. All of us will meet here tomorrow afternoon. Half of our troops will get in on the Maria Street side to occupy the fortresses. For the other half you'll open the small Paul Street gate. These boys will drive out anybody who may be on the *grund*. Or, if they hide among the woodpiles, they'll be bombarded from the fortresses. We need ball-grounds, and we're out to get it—in spite of everything!"

All jumped up.

"Hurrah!" cried the redshirts and raised their spears high over their heads.

Their chief now motioned for silence:

"Another thing I want to ask you, Geréb.

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Don't you think the Paul Street boys suspect you of being with us?"

"I hardly think so," replied the newly appointed lieutenant. "Even if one of them was here at the time the red sign was stuck on the tree, he couldn't have seen me in the dark."

"You mean, then, it's quite safe for you to go among them tomorrow?"

"Sure."

"You don't think they'll be suspicious?"

"No. Even if they did, no one would dare to say so because they are all afraid of me. There isn't anybody there nervy enough!"

A sharp voice suddenly interrupted:

"Oh, yes, there is!"

Everyone looked around in amazement. Feri Áts asked:

"Who said that?"

No one answered. The shrill voice repeated:

"Oh, yes, there is!"

Now they all realized that the voice had come from the top of the tree. Soon thereafter there was a rustling of leaves, a crackling of something among the foliage, and a moment later a blond little fellow dropped down among them. After leaping to the ground from the nethermost limb, the lad calmly brushed off his clothes, stood up

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erect as a pole and fearlessly looked into the eyes of his redshirted hosts. Everyone was too surprised to speak.

Geréb grew visibly pale.

"Nemecsek!" he stammered, aghast.

And the blond youth promptly replied:

"Yes, Nemecsek. That's who I am. And you needn't bother searching for the party that stole the red and green flag from your arsenal. I did it. Here it is. And mine are those tiny feet that are smaller even than Wendauer's. I mightn't have said a word. I could have remained up there in the tree until after you were gone. Why, I have been dozing up there since half-past three. But when Geréb said that no one among us has any courage, I said to myself: 'Wait, I'll show you that there's plenty of guts among the Paul Street boys—even if it is merely Nemecsek, the private!' And so, if you please, here I am. I've overheard your whole discussion. I stole back our flag, and now you may do what you like with me. Beat me, twist the flag out of my hand, because I won't give it up without a fight anyway. Come on. Go to it! I am all alone against your ten."

His cheeks were flushed as he spoke thus and he threw his arms wide open. In one hand he

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clutched the tiny flag. The redshirts were still too astounded to move; they only gazed at this mite of a sandy lad who, to all appearances, dropped from out the sky; and who boldly hurled into their faces a courage and defiance real enough to enable him to lick the entire army, including the Pásztor boys and Feri Áts.

The Pásztor brothers were the first to recover their presence of mind. They strode over to Nemecsek and took hold of his arms. The younger of the two stood at Nemecsek's right and was about to wrench the flag from the boy when suddenly the voice of Feri Áts broke the stillness of this dramatic scene:

"Stop! Don't touch him."

The Pásztor brothers looked in amazement at their chief.

"Don't harm him," Áts repeated. "The boy appeals to me! You're a plucky kid, Nemecsek. What's your full name? Here's my hand. Why not join us?"

Nemecsek shook his head negatively:

"Not I!" he retorted defiantly.

His voice trembled, but not with fear; rather with excitement. Pale, but of serious mien, he stood there and repeated:

"Not I!"

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Feri Áts broke into a smile and said:

"That's all right. I've never yet invited anybody among us. Those that are here all begged to be taken in. You're the first one I've asked to. But if you don't want to, you don't . . ."

And he turned his back on Nemecsek.

"What'll we do to him?" asked the Pásztor brothers.

Their chief merely shrugged a shoulder. The older Pásztor boy suddenly wrenched the red and green bunting from Nemecsek's frail hand. It hurt. The Pásztors had confoundedly tough fists, but the blond little fellow gritted his teeth and did not utter a single sound.

"I've got it!" announced a Pásztor boy.

All those present were breathless with curiosity. What dreadful punishment would the terrible Feri Áts think up? Nemecsek stood his ground undismayed and with pursed lips.

Feri Áts turned to him again and motioned to the Pásztor boys:

"He's too delicate. It isn't fair to beat him up. But . . . you might give him a ducking."

Great was the hilarity among the redshirts. Even Feri Áts was laughing, as well as the Pásztor brothers. Szebenics tossed his cap in the air and Wendauer hopped about like a jumping-

The Paul Street Boys

jack. Even Geréb, sitting under the tree, laughed; the only grave countenance in that gay party was the tiny face of Nemecek. He had a cold and had been coughing for days. His mother had forbidden him to go out that day, but he could not stay in his room. At three o'clock he had slipped out of the house, and from half-past three until just a while ago had been up in the tree. But not for the whole world would he now hint at this. Why should he let them know that he had a cold? They would laugh at him so much more, especially Geréb, who seemed to be having a grand time at his expense. So Nemecek said nothing. Mutely and amid general exultation, he suffered himself to be taken to the bank where the Pásztor boys were to dip him into the shallow lagoon. Dreadful, indeed, were these two brothers. One of them pinned his hands down, while the other held his head. They plunged him neck-deep into the water, whereupon everyone on the island laughed in glee. The redshirts danced about jubilantly, and flung their caps in the air, boisterously crying:

"Hip, hip, hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

This was their triumphal cry. And the voluminous "Hip, hip, hurrahs," mingled with un-

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restrained laughter and raucous rejoicing, disturbed the nocturnal silence of the little island. On the bank, near the spot where Nemecsek—like a melancholy little frog—was sadly blinking out of the water, stood Geréb with feet apart, chortling and nodding his head tauntingly toward the sandy little fellow.

Presently the Pásztor boys released Nemecsek and he waded out of the water. At sight of this dripping and muddy little figure, the gang broke into even more boisterous gaiety. Nemecsek was drenched to the skin and, as he shook his arms, the water ran out of the sleeves as from a can. They scurried away as he shook himself—dog fashion. Words of contempt were hurled at him:

“Frog!”

“Did you get a drink?”

“Why didn’t you swim a little?”

Nemecsek deigned them no reply. He smiled bitterly and smoothed the creases of his water-soaked jacket. Now Geréb planted himself in front of Nemecsek. His mouth was stretched into a wide grin as, with an impudent nod, he said:

“Was it good?”

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Nemecsek fixed his big blue eyes on Geréb and replied:

"Yes," and quietly added: "Much better than to be standing on the bank, laughing at me. I'd rather stay in the water neck-deep until New Year than be hand-in-hand with my friends' enemies. I don't mind having been dipped in the water. The other day I fell in there by myself. I saw you then, too, with these strangers on the island. But you fellows can invite me as long as you like, you can flatter me and shower me with presents—yet I won't have a thing to do with you. And if you give me another ducking, if you throw me in the water a hundred times, or even a thousand times, I'll come here tomorrow and the day after just the same. I'll find a hiding place where you won't get me. I'm not afraid of any one of you. And if you'll come to Paul Street to take our ground away, we'll be on the spot! And don't you forget that either! I'll show you that with ten of us against your ten, you'll hear a different sort of talk from what I'm giving you now. It was easy enough to get the better of me! The one that's stronger always wins! The Pásztor boys stole my aggies in the Museum garden because they were stronger. Now I got a ducking because

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"You are stronger! Easy enough when you are against me! But I don't care! You can even beat me up, it will do you good. I could have saved myself from the ducking, but I wouldn't own you. I'd rather be drowned or have my brains knocked out than be a traitor . . . like . . . somebody smothering over . . . there."

He thrust out one arm, pointing it at Geréb, whose laughter suddenly stuck in his throat. The flickering light of the lantern fell upon Nemeček's attractive blond head and gleaming clothes. Fearless and proud, with heart unmoved, he gazed into the eyes of Geréb. And Geréb felt as if that frank look had dropped a weight upon his soul. He grew nervous and bowed his head. At that moment all the boys were as silent as though they were in church. The sound of water dripping from Nemeček's clothes was clearly heard. . . .

This great silence was broken by Nemeček's own exclamation:

"May I go!?"

No one ventured to answer it. Once again he asked:

"Aren't you going to beat me up? Can I go away!?"

And since no one ventured to speak, calmly

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and quietly he started toward the bridge. Not a hand was raised, not a solitary lad budged from his place. Every one felt that this mite of a blond boy was a veritable hero, a real man who deserved to be a grown-up. . . . The sentinels on the bridge, who were witnesses to the entire episode, merely stared at him in wonderment, but none of them dared touch him. As Nemecek stepped upon the bridge, the deep, thunderous voice of Feri Áts rang out:

“Salute!”

And the guards snapped into attention and raised their silver-tipped spears high in the air. All the other boys clicked their heels together and likewise raised their spears aloft. No one spoke; the moonbeams glittered eloquently on the silver-tipped spears. Only Nemecek's retreating footsteps were heard thudding against the bridge. Soon even that died away and was replaced by a sort of a squeak, as when some one walked in water-filled shoes . . . Nemecek was gone.

The redshirts on the island exchanged furtive glances. Feri Áts stood in the middle of the clearing, his head bowed low. Now Geréb, pale as a ghost, stepped forward and mumbled something.

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"You see . . . I . . ." he began.

But Feri Áts turned his back on Geréb. Then Geréb went over to the motionless group of boys and stopped in front of the older Pásztor.

"You understand . . . old man . . ." he quavered.

But Pásztor followed the example of his chief. He, too, turned his back on Geréb, who now stood completely nonplussed. He did not know what to do next. Presently he spoke up, in a repressed tone:

"I guess I may as well leave."

But that, too, failed to elicit response. So Geréb started along the same trail that Nemecsek followed only a minute before. But no one offered to salute him. The sentinels leaned upon the railing of the bridge and gazed into the water. Geréb's footsteps, too, died away in the silence of the Botanical Gardens. . . .

Now that the redshirts remained alone, Feri Áts stirred for the first time and strode over to the older Pásztor boy. He stepped quite close to him, so that their faces almost met. Quietly he asked:

"Was it you who took the aggies away from that kid in the Museum Garden?"

Pásztor replied just as quietly:

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"Yes."

"Was your brother there, too?"

"Yes."

"Was there an *einstand*?"

"There was."

"Haven't I strickly warned the redshirts not to rob weak boys of their aggies?"

The Pásztor boys were mute. Feri Áts tolerated no opposition. The chief cast a stern glance at the two brothers and, in a voice that brooked no contradiction, he quietly said:

"Take a ducking."

The brothers looked at Áts in puzzlement.

"Get me! Just as you are, clothes and all, get into the water!"

Then, seeing that one or two faces nearby were ready to smirk, he said:

"And anyone who laughs at them will get a ducking, too."

That effectually discouraged all levity. Áts looked at the Pásztor boys again and, in an insistent tone, said:

"Go on now! Into the water with you! To the neck. One, two, three! Then he turned to the other boys:

"About face! Don't look!"

The redshirts wheeled around and remained

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standing with their backs to the water. Feri Áts himself also refrained from witnessing how the Pásztor boys imposed their own punishment. Slowly and dispirited, they walked into the lagoon and obediently sat down so as to be immersed to the neck. No one saw them; only their splashing was heard. Feri Áts glanced in their direction to convince himself that his orders had been followed to the letter. Then he called out:

“Lower arms. March!”

He led his army from the island. The sentinels extinguished the lantern and joined the troop which, marching in military fashion, tramped across the bridge and disappeared in the woods. . . .

The Pásztor boys crawled out of the water. They glared at each other, then thrust their hands into their pockets, as usually, and started off. They did not say a word, for they felt thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

The island remained forsaken in the silence of the moonlit Spring night. . . .

CHAPTER SIX

On the afternoon of the following day, when, about half-past two, the boys straggled through the *grund* gate, they discovered a large sheet of paper, fastened to the fence with four huge nails.

It was a proclamation to the composition of which Boka had sacrificed a whole night. It was printed in black except that the initial letters of every sentence were done in red. The full text of the proclamation read as follows:

"PROCLAMATION!!!

"All of us must be on guard!

"Grave danger threatens our domain and, unless we are courageous, it will be taken from us!

"The *grund* is in peril!

"The redshirts are planning to attack us!

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"But we shall be there to repel them and, if need be, to defend our domain with our very lives!

"Each one must do his duty!

(Signed) "The president."

No one felt like playing baseball this day. The ball reposed quietly in Richter's pocket; he was keeper of the ball. The boys were pacing up and down, discussing with great earnestness the impending battle. Every now and then they returned to the fence, so as to re-read the proclamation. Some of them read twenty times that inspiring document. There were those who knew it by heart and declaimed it—in martial accents—from atop this or that woodpile.

The entire army was impregnated with the spirit of the proclamation—the first of its kind. The situation must have been grave indeed, and the danger very real, if Boka deemed it necessary to issue a proclamation over his own, supreme, signature.

Certain details had been rumored already. Here and there the name of Geréb recurred, but no one had any definite knowledge of what was in the air. For reasons best known to himself, the president saw fit to withhold the infor-

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mation concerning Geréb. Among others, because he hoped that he would catch Geréb right on the *grund* and immediately court-martial him. Of course, Boka had not the remotest suspicion that little Nemecsek would, of his own planning, steal out to the Botanical Gardens and there, in the very midst of that hostile camp, precipitate the most scandalous incident the world had ever heard of. . . . He had learned of it only that morning soon after the Latin period. He had been in the act of buying a slice of buttered bread at the school lunch counter when Nemecsek called him aside and told him about it. On the *grund*, however, complete uncertainty reigned and everyone was waiting for the president to arrive. The general excitement was augmented by another upsetting occurrence, within the Putty Club. It had been discovered that the official lump of putty became dry, brittle and hence, unusable. This was to be construed to mean that the putty had thus become unfit for squeezing. Undoubtedly this was the fault of the president of the club. As previously explained, it was the duty of this officer to chew the club putty at certain intervals. Kolnay, the new president, woefully neglected this task. It is easy enough to surmise who was first to com-

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plain against this delinquency. Barabás broached it censoriously to various members. His efforts resulted in a demand for a special meeting. Kolnay was shrewd enough to guess what the meeting aimed at.

"Very well," he said, "but the *grund* affair calls for first consideration. I'll call a special meeting for tomorrow."

But Barabás raised a rumpus:

"We won't put up with that sort of thing! Mr. President, you seem to be scared!"

"Of you?"

"Not of me, but of the general meeting! We demand that the meeting be called for today."

Kolnay was on the point of retorting when suddenly there rang out the watchword of the Paul Street Boys:

"Yo-ho, Ho! Yo-ho, Ho!"

They all glanced toward the gate. Boka entered. Beside him was Nemecsek with a large knitted red shawl wrapped around his neck. The chief's arrival put a halt to their argument. Kolnay decided to yield:

"Very well, we'll have that special meeting yet today. But now we'll first hear what Boka has to say."

"That's agreeable to me," replied Barabás. But

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by now all members of the Putty Club had gathered around Boka and were besieging him with a thousand and one questions. The two disputants quickly joined the others. Boka bade them be silent. Then, amid the closest attention, he said:

"Boys, I suppose all of you have read in the proclamation of the danger that threatens us. Our spies penetrated the enemy's camp and have discovered that the redshirts are planning to attack us tomorrow."

A murmur of amazement ran through the ranks. No one had any idea that war was so near.

"Yes, tomorrow," proceeded Boka, "and so I hereby declare a state of war. Everybody must absolutely obey his superiors and all officers must obey me. And don't any of you think that this is child's play. The redshirts are strong fellows and there are many of them. It's bound to be a stiff battle. But we don't want to force anybody into it. Therefore, I want it understood that those who do not wish to fight may say so right here and now!"

Deep silence ensued. No one responded. Boka repeated:

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"All those not wishing to go to war, step forward. Is there no such person among you?"

All together they shouted:

"No!"

"If that's the case, I want your words of honor that you'll all be here at two o'clock tomorrow."

One by one they stepped before Boka and gave their pledge to appear tomorrow. After shaking their hands, Boka said in a fervent tone:

"And anyone failing to show up tomorrow will be considered a scurvy hypocrite, and he'd better not put his foot in here again because we'll chase him out of here with a stick."

Leszik stepped out of line:

"Mr. President," he said, "all of us are here, except Geréb."

Deathly silence followed this announcement. All were eager to hear what was the matter with Geréb. But Boka was not the sort of boy to deviate from his original plan. He was not inclined to surrender Geréb until he himself had caught him in the act. Several of the boys inquired:

"What *about* Geréb?"

"Nothing," Boka replied calmly. "We'll talk about that some other time. For the time being, we must see to it that our battle is won."

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However, before giving out instructions, I have something else to say. If there is any enmity among you, let it be forgotten now. I want those of you who are on the outs to make up."

Silence.

"Well?" demanded the president. "Is there none of you sore at another?"

Weisz spoke up with some diffidence:

"I happen to know that . . ."

"Go on, out with it!"

"That . . . Kolnay . . . and Barabás . . ."

"Is it true?"

Barabás grew red in the face.

"Yes," he admitted, "Kolnay . . . he . . ."

And Kolnay broke in:

"Yes . . . Barabás . . . he . . ."

"That'll do. Make up at once," commanded Boka, "or I'll throw out the pair of you! We can fight the enemy only if we're all the best of friends!"

The two enemies sidled over to Boka and reluctantly extended their hands to each other. They had not yet released this handclasp when Barabás spoke up:

"Mr. President."

"What is it?"

"I have one condition to make."

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"Well?"

"In case . . . the redshirts don't attack us . . . then . . . I want permission to be sore at Kolnay again . . . because . . ."

Boka gave him a piercing look:

"Shut up!"

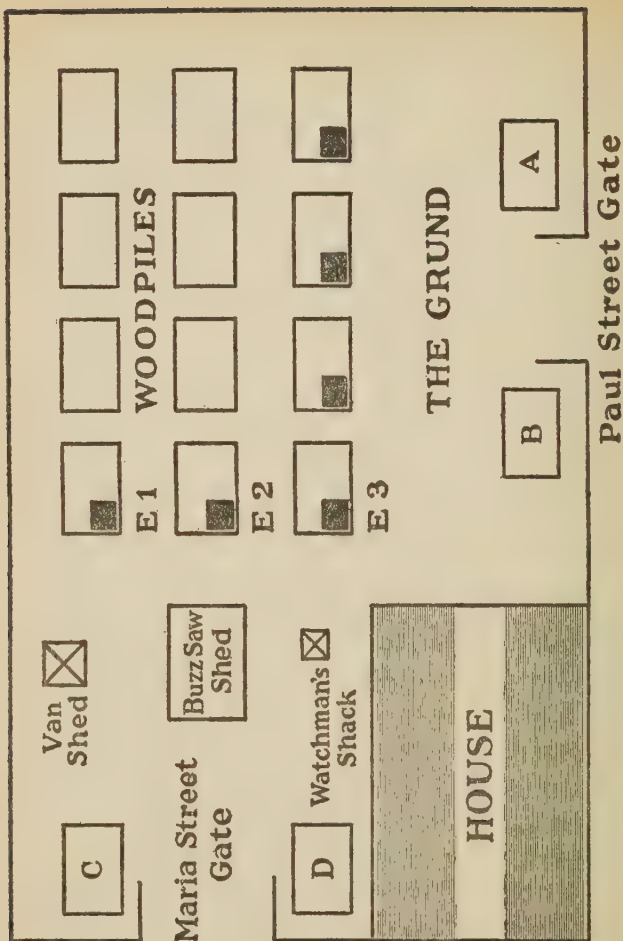
That silenced Barabás. But inwardly he was fuming, and would have given a great deal at that moment to be able to jab Kolnay in the ribs; but the latter was smiling gayly . . .

"And now," said Boka, "Private Nemecsek will hand me our war plans."

Obediently Nemecsek reached into his pocket and drew forth a sheet of paper. This was the plan concocted by Boka right after luncheon. It was a war map drafted as shown.

Nemecsek spread it on a stone slab and all the boys squatted around it. Everyone was anxious to know to what position he had been assigned, what rôle was in store for him. Boka launched into an explanation of the war plan:

"Pay close attention. Keep your eyes on the sketch. It is the map of our domain. According to the reports of our spies, the enemy intends to attack on two sides: the Paul Street side and the Maria Street side. Now, let's be systematic. This square here, with the letters A and B, rep-



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resents the two divisions detailed to defend the gate. Division A consists of three men under Weisz's command. Division B also has three men, headed by Leszik. The gate on Maria Street will be defended by two more divisions. Richter will have charge of Division C, while Kolnay will lead Division D."

Here a voice interrupted:

"Why not me?"

"Who was that?" demanded Boka sternly.

Barabás admitted it was he.

"You again! If I hear another word out of you, I'll have you court-martialled! Sit down."

Barabás mumbled something, then sat down. Boka continued his elucidation:

"These black dots, marked by capital E's and figures, represent the fortresses. These will be re-enforced by sand, so that two men will be enough for each fortress. It's a cinch to fight with sand. Moreover, the fortresses are so near to each other that, if one is attacked, the others may join in the bombardment against the enemy. Fortresses 1, 2 and 3 will defend the *grund* on the Maria Street side, 4, 5 and 6 will assist, with sand bombs, Divisions A and B. Just who will go where, I will decide later. Each division com-

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mandant will pick his own personnel. Do you understand?"

"Yes!" was the unanimous reply.

The boys all sat agape and wide-eyed around this splendid war-map, some of them zealously making notes of what their war-lord-president had said.

"So far so good," resumed Boka. "That takes care of our strategic positions. Now come the military instructions. All of you listen close. Immediately after the patrol on top of the fence reports that the redshirts are coming, Divisions A and B will open the gate."

"Open it?"

"Yes, you'll open it. We won't hide from them because we want to give them battle. Let them get in first, then we'll drive them out. So, as I say, you'll open the gate and let their troops enter. As soon as their last man steps in, you'll attack them. At the same time, fortresses 4, 5 and 6 will begin to bombard them. This is the duty of one troop—the Paul Street army. You'll make every effort to drive them out, if you fail in that, you will at least prevent them from breaking through the line formed by fortresses 3, 4, 5 and 6 and from remaining on the *grund*. The other army, the one on Maria Street, has a

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much harder task ahead. You, Richter and Kolnay, pay close attention. Divisions C and D will send a patrol into Maria Street. When the other army of redshirts emerges in that region, your divisions must line up ready for battle. After the redshirts have come through the big gate, both divisions will pretend hasty retreat. Here, look at the map . . . do you see my point? Division C, that's yours, Richter . . . will run into the wagon shed . . ."

Boka pointed with his finger: "Right here. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"On the other hand, Division C, that's Kolnay's, will run into Janó's shack. Now watch carefully, for what follows is very important. And keep a sharp eye on the map. The redshirts will naturally run around along both sides of the buzz-saw. But behind the saw they'll come face to face with fortresses 1, 2 and 3. These will start bombardment at once. At that very moment the two divisions will rush forth—one from the shed, the other from the shack—and make a rear attack upon the enemy. If you'll fight bravely, the enemy will thus be forced into a tight corner and will have to surrender. If not, you'll drive them into the shack

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and bolt the door on them. After that's done, Division C will emerge beside the shack and Division D—by marching around the woodpiles—beside fortress 6, and the two together will hasten to the aid of Divisions A and B. The troops of fortresses 1 and 2 will, at the same time, enter fortresses 4 and 5 in order to make the bombardment all the more heated. After that, Divisions A, B, C and D will form one solid line of attack that must force the enemy toward the Paul Street gate. Meanwhile all the fortresses will be bombarding the enemy over our heads. I am sure they won't be able to withstand our concerted attack. And so we'll be bound to drive them out through the Paul Street gate! Is that clear?"

A spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm was the response. The boys jubilantly waved their kerchiefs and tossed their hats in the air. Nemecek removed from around his neck the big knitted scarf and, in a catarrhal voice, joined in the cheering:

"Huddah foh de pwesident!"

"Hurrah!" cried the others in chorus.

But Boka motioned again:

"Silence! One thing more. My adjutant and I will be within hailing distance of Divisions C

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and D. Whatever orders I send you through him will have to be considered as my personal commands."

A voice ventured to query:

"Who is going to be your adjutant?"

"Nemecsek."

Some of the boys looked at each other. Members of the Putty Club even nudged one another as if to say that Boka's choice called for protest. Such opinions as the following were heard:

"Go on, speak up!"

"You do it!"

"Why should I? You ought to!"

Boka looked at them in amazement:

"Do any of you object?"

Leszik was the only one who dared voice his sentiments:

"Yes."

"On what ground?"

"At the last general meeting of the Putty Club . . . when . . ."

Boka lost his patience and shouted at Leszik:

"That'll do. Not another word. I don't care to hear your stupidities. Nemecsek will be my adjutant, and that settles it. Anyone who dares

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to say a word against him will be court-martialled."

All of which may have sounded a trifle too severe, yet they all realized that in time of war it is the only way to make real headway. And so they resigned themselves to having Nemecsek as second in command. Nevertheless there were whispered grumblings among leading members of the Putty Club; they regarded it an affront to their organization. They thought it shameful to accord so important a post, in war time, to one whom their own general assembly had branded a traitor, and whose name they had entered, in small letters, in the official black book of the club. Alas! had they but known. . . .

Now Boka produced a roster and read aloud the exact position to which each soldier had been assigned. The division commandants each picked their two men. The proceedings were very solemn, and the boys were so thrilled that none uttered a sound. This done, Boka issued his orders:

"All take their positions. We'll have regular military maneuvers."

They scurried in all directions, to their designated places.

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"All of you wait until further orders!" called Boka after them. He remained alone with his adjutant, Nemecsek. The poor adjutant coughed loudly.

"I say, Ernie," said Boka gently, "wrap that scarf back around your neck. You've got a bad cold."

Nemecsek looked gratefully at his friend and obeyed him as if he had been his own brother. He rewrapped himself in the big red scarf, so that only his ears were uncovered. After that, Boka said:

"Now I'm going to send an order with you to fortress 2. Listen well. . . ."

But just then Nemecsek did something he had never done before. He interrupted his superior officer.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but first I'd like to say something to you!"

Boka frowned:

"What is it?"

"A while ago, members of the Putty Club . . ."

"What does it matter?" shouted the president impatiently. "Surely, you don't take them seriously?"

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"Yes, I do," Nemecsek replied, "because they themselves are so darned serious about it. I feel that they are stupid and I don't care what they think of me. But I'd hate to have you, too, . . . despise me."

"And why would I despise you?"

From among the fringes of the big red scarf a whining voice replied:

"Because they . . . they branded . . . me . . . a traitor. . . ."

"A traitor! You?"

"Yes. Me."

"Well, well, I'm really curious about that."

And Nemecsek related, in a halting, sputtering voice, what had transpired. He told Boka how he had to hurry away just as the Putty Club boys were in the act of taking the secret oath; that they immediately took advantage of this accident by declaring that he was afraid to join their secret order; that they branded him a dastardly traitor.

Nemecsek likewise expressed the opinion that all this was so because certain first- and second-lieutenants, as well as captains, resented the fact that their president did not pal with them and, moreover, confided all state secrets to a mere private. And, finally, Nemecsek thought it

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alarming that his name had been entered—entirely in small letters—in the black book.

Boka listened patiently to Nemecsek's recital. Then he was quiet. It pained him to know that there were boys of such calibre in the group. Boka was a shrewd lad, but he did not as yet know that other people are quite different from us, and that we usually learn of this at the cost of some feeling of anguish. He looked at the sandy youth with affection.

"Don't you worry, Ernie," he said, "just you mind your own duties and ignore them. I don't want to start a rumpus now before the war. But, after the battle is over, I'll pounce down on them. Now ride fast to fortresses 1 and 2 and deliver my orders, that the boys crawl over to fortresses 4 and 5. I want to see how much time it will take to do so."

Private Nemecsek snapped into attention, saluted stiffly and, though unable to repress the sorrowful thought that because of war the question of his own honor must suffer delay, smothered his bitterness and said in true soldierly fashion:

"At your command, sir!"

With that he galloped away. Dust clouds followed in his wake and soon the adjutant van-

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ished among the woodpiles, on top of which guileless and wide-eyed children were peeping from behind citadels. Their faces reflected the excitement which grips real soldiers just before the battle—as described for us by fearless and discerning war correspondents.

Boka remained all alone in the very center of the *grund*. To be sure, the rumble of wheels clearly penetrated to this strip of enclosed ground. Yet Boka felt as if he were not at all in the heart of the city but somewhere far, far away, on foreign soil, on a vast field where, on the morrow, the destiny of nations would be decided. The boys did not utter a single sound; everyone stood calmly, awaiting further orders. Boka realized that everything depended on him. The welfare and future of this little group. The jolly afternoons, the ball-games, the various other games and entertainments which he and his pals used to enjoy. And Boka was filled with pride at the thought of having assumed so noble a task.

“Yes,” he said to himself, “I’ll protect you all!”

He surveyed the precious spot. Then he gazed toward the woodpiles, from among which the slender steel chimney of the sawmill inquis-

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itively reared its head and belched fleecy snow-white cloudlets with the same care-free air as though this day were just like all others—as though it were untrue that everything, yes, everything, was now at stake. . . .

Boka experienced an unmistakable sense of greatness, like a military leader on the eve of a crucial battle. He thought of the great Napoleon. . . . And his mind strayed into the future. What would become of him? What sort of a career was he destined for? Would he be a soldier, a real soldier, commanding uniformed troops on some distant battlefield—fighting not for a piece of land, such as this *grund* of theirs, but for that vast sweet territory known as the Fatherland? Or would he turn out to be a physician, daily waging war, grimly serious war, against human affliction?

Early Autumnal dusk fell quietly in accompaniment to Boka's reveries. A deep sigh burst from his lips as he started for the woodpiles in order to review the troops that were to man the fortresses.

The boys atop the woodpiles saw their chief approaching. They began to stir. The sand bombs were placed in a row and everyone stood at attention.

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But their leader suddenly halted midway and glanced backward. He seemed to be listening. Then he wheeled about and, with hurried strides, went to the small gate.

There was a knock. Boka shot the bolt back and opened the gate, then recoiled in amazement. It was Geréb who stood before him.

"You?" Geréb stammered in bewilderment.

Boka was flustered for the moment, so that he could not reply. Geréb slowly entered and closed the gate behind himself. Boka was still puzzled as to Geréb's mission. But the latter was clearly not so calm and gay as he used to be. He was pale and dejected; he was nervously straightening his collar and, obviously, wanted to say something, but did not know how to begin. Boka was equally silent. Thus they stood facing each other for a few moments. Finally Geréb spoke up:

"I've come to have a . . . er . . . a word with you."

Boka recovered his power of speech. In a simple but serious tone he replied:

"I have nothing to talk to you about. The smartest thing you can do now is to get out by the gate you came through."

Geréb did not heed this suggestion.

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"See here, Boka," he said, "I know that you know everything. I also know that all of you know about my selling out to the redshirts. I have not come here now as a spy, but as a friend."

Quietly Boka said:

"You cannot have come here as a friend."

Geréb drooped his head. He had been fully prepared to be rudely received, to be driven out, but he scarcely expected to be spoken to in such a quiet and sorrowful tone. Now he, too, lowered his voice and spoke penitently:

"I've come to undo the wrong I committed."

"That cannot be done," said Boka.

"But I am sorry . . . really very sorry . . . and I've brought back with me the flag that Feri Áts carried off and Nemecsek stole back . . . and which the Pásztor boys later twisted out of little Nemecsek's hand. . . ."

That said, he drew from under his jacket the tiny red and green bunting. Boka's eyes lighted up. The little flag was rumpled, even somewhat shredded; it was evident that battles had been fought over it.

"As for the flag," said Boka, "we'll recapture it from the redshirts ourselves. If we can't, why, then nothing else will matter much. . . . In that case, we'll be leaving here anyway . . .

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we'll have to scatter . . . never to be together again. . . . But we don't want the flag this way. Nor do we want you. . . ."

With that he was about to go, as if eager to leave Geréb. But the latter clutched the edge of his jacket.

"Boka," he said in a husky voice, "I admit I have sinned terribly against you fellows. And I want to do the right thing now. Forgive me . . . all of you."

"Oh," Boka replied, "I've forgiven you already."

"And you'll take me back?"

"No indeed."

"Under no condition?"

"No."

Geréb pulled out his handkerchief and raised it to his eyes. Boka sadly said:

"Don't cry, Geréb. Not here in front of me. Please go home, like a good fellow, and leave us alone. Of course, you've come here now because you've discredited yourself with the red-shirts, too."

Geréb pocketed his kerchief and attempted to assume an air of manliness:

"Very well," he said, "I'll go away. You fellows will never see me again. But I give you my

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word of honor that I didn't come here because the redshirts hate me. There's another reason."

"And what might that be?"

"I won't tell you. You'll probably find it out. But when you do, it'll be a sorry day for me. . . ."

Boka looked at him, puzzled:

"I don't get you at all."

"I won't stop to explain now," Geréb stammered and made for the small gate. There he stopped and turned to look back once more. He said:

"I guess it would be no use to ask you again to take me back?"

"No use."

"Well then . . . I won't."

He dashed out and slammed the gate. Boka hesitated a moment. This was the first instance in his life in which he had shown cruelty toward a human being. He was strongly tempted to run after the lad, to call: "Come back, but promise to behave!" But this impulse was quickly checked by the recollection of the incident in which Geréb, laughing sardonically, ran away from him. He could not forget the scene, on Paul Street, when Nemecsek and he stood sadly on the curbstone, with the running Geréb's snicker in his ears.

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"No," he decided, "I won't call him back. He is a bad boy."

He turned around to go toward the woodpiles, but suddenly stopped, dumbfounded. There, atop the woodpiles, were all of the boys; they had been silent witnesses to the scene. Even those not assigned to fortress duty were there. The entire little army was lined up on symmetrical logs. Not one of them uttered a sound; with bated breath they had waited to see what would happen between Boka and Geréb. Now that Geréb had gone and Boka was heading toward them, their pent-up feelings gave vent to a spontaneous outburst of jubilation.

"Hurrah!" rang out a chorus of buoyant childish voices, and their caps flew high in the air.

"Long live the president!"

And a frightful shriek rent the air, a sound such as no steam locomotive, however competent, can produce. It was a clangorous, triumphant whistle; the contribution of Csónakos, of course. His face was radiant with joy as, grinning, he said:

"Gee, I've never enjoyed whistling so much in all my life!"

Boka stopped in the center of the *grund* and,

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deeply moved, blissfully saluted his army. Once again he could not help thinking of the great Napoleon. He—it is said—had been so beloved by his guardsmen. . . .

All the boys had seen the encounter between Boka and Geréb, and now they had a fairly clear idea of the latter's perfidy. Though too far away to hear what the two boys had said to each other, they gathered much from gestures. They saw Boka's spurning attitude. They saw him refuse to shake hands. They saw Geréb burst into tears and they saw him depart. They had felt somewhat uneasy when Geréb, on the way out, had stopped at the gate to plead with Boka once more. At that moment Leszik was moved to whisper:

"Heavens . . . what if he forgives him now?"

But, seeing Boka shake his head adamant, so that Geréb was obliged to leave, they burst into frenetic enthusiasm. And their unanimous "Hurrah" greeted their chief. They relished the idea that their president proved himself to be a real man, rather than a mere child. They would have loved to hug him and kiss him. But, then, it was war time; all they could do was to shout. This they did with full lung and throat power.

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"You're a tough one, daddykin!" said Csónakos proudly. But he quickly regretted the familiarity and hastened to correct himself:

"Not 'daddykin' . . . I beg pardon . . . Mr. President."

With that their maneuvers began. Ringing commands were heard, troops were seen dashing about among the woodpiles, fortresses were attacked, and sand bombs filled the air. Everything went along splendidly. All knew their parts admirably. All of which enhanced their spirits.

"We're sure to win!" came from all sides.

"We'll drive them out!"

"We'll tie all prisoners!"

"We'll capture Feri Áts himself!"

Only Boka remained serious.

"Don't let too much victory go to your heads," he admonished them. "Save your gayety for after the battle. And now all those that wish may go home. I repeat: anyone failing to show up on time tomorrow will be considered disloyal!"

Although the maneuvers were at an end, no one seemed inclined to go home. They dispersed in groups to discuss the Geréb affair.

Barabás called out in a rasping voice:

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"Putty Club! Putty Club!"

"What about it?" asked the boys.

"General meeting."

Kolnay was painfully reminded of the general meeting he had promised them a short while before. He would have to clear himself of the charge that he had permitted the official lump of putty to become dry. Ruefully he resigned himself to the possible consequences.

"Very well," he said, "let's have that meeting. I request the honorable members to step to one side."

And the honorable members, with the gloating Barabás at their head, marched out from among the woodpiles, over to the fence, to hold their general meeting.

"Hear, hear!" cried Barabás. Kolnay, assuming an official air, said:

"I declare the meeting open. Mr. Barabás has asked for the floor."

"Khm, hm!" began Barabás, ominously clearing his throat. "Fellow members, our president had a streak of luck because the maneuvers almost caused the postponement of this meeting, which intends to fire him out of office."

"Aha! Aha!" came from members of the opposition.

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"You may 'aha' all you like," bellowed the speaker, "I know what I am talking about! Our president managed, through the maneuvers, to put the thing off for a while, but he can't delay it any more. We now . . ."

He suddenly stopped. There was a violent rapping on the small gate, and these were moments of anxiety for all the boys. No one knew but that the enemy might be near.

"Who was that?" the speaker inquired, and all of them pricked their ears.

Again the sound of vigorous, impatient, rapping.

"Someone is at the gate," said Kolnay in a trembling voice and peeped through a crevice in the fence. Then, with surprise in his eyes, he turned to the boys:

"There's a gentleman outside."

"A gentleman?"

"Yes. A gentleman with whiskers."

"Open the gate for him."

Kolnay opened the gate. Sure enough, it was a well-dressed gentleman who entered. He wore a top coat with a big black collar, he had a black semicircular beard and eye-glasses. He stopped at the threshold and called in:

"Are you the Paul Street Boys?"

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"Yes," replied the whole Putty Club.

Thereupon the mysterious gentleman drew nearer and his gaze became more friendly.

"I'm Geréb's father," he said, as he closed the little gate.

This statement produced general silence. It seemed like a serious matter, if Geréb's father found it necessary to call on them. Leszik nudged Richter:

"You'd better run to get Boka right away."

Richter darted away toward the sawmill, where he found Boka in the midst of retailing the misdeeds of Geréb. The bearded gentleman turned to the members of the Putty Club:

"Tell me why you expelled my son?"

Kolnay stepped forward:

"Because he betrayed us to the redshirts."

"Who are the redshirts?"

"That's another gang of boys, who meet in the Botanical Gardens . . . but now they want to take this place away from us, because they have no ball-grounds. They're our enemies."

The bearded gentleman knit his brow:

"My boy came home crying a while ago. I quizzed him for a long time, but he would not tell me what is the matter. Finally, after I demanded that he tell me, he confessed being ac-

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cused of treachery. So I said to him: 'Now I'll take my hat and go to those boys. I'll talk to them and get at the bottom of the thing. If it is not true, I'll insist that they apologize to you. But if it is true, there will be trouble, for your father has been an honorable man all his life and will not tolerate that his son be a traitor of his pals.' That's what I told him. And now I'm here to call on you to tell me honestly, on your souls, whether my son is a traitor or not. Now then?"

More silence.

"Well?" demanded Geréb's father. "Don't be afraid of me. I want the truth. I must know whether my son has been unfairly injured, or does he deserve to be punished?"

No one replied. No one felt like adding to the bitterness of this kindly, cloaked man, who seemed so jealous of the character of his boy. Now he turned to Kolnay:

"You said that he betrayed you boys. Now it is up to you to prove it. When and how did he betray you?"

Kolnay stammered:

"I . . . why . . . I . . . only . . . heard . . ."

"That's nothing. Which one of you knows

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anything definitely? Who saw him do it? Who knows the facts?"

At that very moment, Boka and Nemecsek were seen emerging near the woodpiles. Richter was bringing them. Kolnay breathed with relief.

"You see, sir," he said, "there comes . . . that little blond fellow . . . his name is Nemecsek . . . he saw it. He knows all about it."

They waited until the three boys came up. But Nemecsek made straight for the gate. Kolnay called out:

"Boka! Nemecsek!! Come here a minute!"

"Can't do it now," Boka called back, "please wait a while. Nemecsek is very ill, he's just had a bad coughing spell . . . I've got to take him home first. . . ."

The man in the topcoat, upon hearing Nemecsek's name mentioned, called over:

"That you Nemecsek?"

"Yes," softly replied the sandy youth and went over to the dark gentleman, who sternly said to him:

"I'm Geréb's father, and I came here to find out whether my son is really a traitor or not. Your companions here say that you know the

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truth. So, I want you to answer me in all sincerity: is it or is it not true?"

Nemecsek's cheeks were burning with fever. He was really sick. His temples were throbbing and his hands were hot. And all the world around him seemed so strange. . . . This bewhiskered and bespectacled gentleman, with a voice as stern as that of Professor Rácz—when addressing delinquent students . . . these gaping boys . . . the war . . . and all the excitement . . . and this urgent question, behind which loomed also the prospect that, if Geréb really turned out to have been a traitor, there would be trouble. . . .

"Answer me!" insisted the dark man. "Speak up now, all those who know! Answer me! Was he a traitor?"

And the blond little fellow, his cheeks and eyes ablaze with fever, spoke with quiet boldness, as though he were the guilty one eager to confess:

"No, sir. He is not a traitor."

The father looked proudly at the others:

"Then you all lied to me?"

The Putty Club stood dumbfounded. Not a hiss was heard.

"Aha!" said the bewhiskered man sardon-

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ically. "So all of you lied! I felt right along that my son is an honest child!"

Nemecsek could scarcely stand on his feet. Modestly he asked:

"May I go now?"

The bearded man laughed at him:

"Yes, you little know-it-all!"

Nemecsek—assisted by Boka—reeled out into the street. Now everything was blurred before his eyes. He saw nothing. As in a mist, he saw the dark man, the street, the woodpiles . . . all tripping in front of him. And he seemed to hear queer phrases beating against his eardrums. "Up to the fortress, boys!" shrieked one of these. Then another voice: "Is my son a traitor?" And the dark man laughing scornfully while his mouth grew to the size of the school gate . . . and through this gate came the figure of Professor Rácz. . . .

Nemecsek doffed his hat.

"Whom are you greeting?" Boka asked.

"Why, there isn't a soul in sight."

"I am saying hello to Professor Rácz," Nemecsek quietly replied.

And Boka began to weep. With all the speed at his command he dragged his little pal homeward through the growing dusk.

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Back on the *grund* Kolnay stepped forward again and said to the dark gentleman:

"I tell you, sir, this fellow Nemecsek is a liar. We've branded him a traitor and expelled him from the club."

But Geréb's father was too happy to argue, so he said:

"He looks it, too. He has a sly face and a troubled conscience."

Blissfully he went home to forgive his son. On the corner of Üllői Avenue he had a glimpse of Nemecsek as, with the support of Boka, he stumbled across the vehicle pathway just in front of the Municipal Clinic. But by now Nemecsek, too, was in tears, crying bitterly with all the acute anguish of his "Private" heart. And all through this paroxysm of tears he repeatedly mumbled:

"They entered my name in small letters . . . my poor little honest name . . . written in small letters. . . ."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Next day, during the Latin period, excitement ran so high that Professor Rácz noticed it. The boys were squirming in their seats, gazing through the windows and generally inattentive. This held true not only of the Paul Street Boys, but of the others as well; I might say, of the entire school. The rumor had quickly spread—throughout the vast building—that great preparations for war were under way. Even those in the advanced classes, the so-called seventh and eight grade students, evinced keen interest in the matter. The redshirts were students of a *Real* school in the Josephtown section of the city. Hence the whole *gymnasium* was as one in wishing victory to the Paul Street Boys. Indeed, there were many who thought

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that the honor of the school rested upon such victory.

"What has come over you boys today?" asked Professor Rácz impatiently. "You are fidgety and absent-minded, and your minds are not on your lessons!"

Further than this he did not pry into their state of mind. He contented himself with the explanation that this was a restless day among his pupils. In a querulous voice he said:

"Of course, Spring is here, aggies and baseball . . . school does not appeal to you now! Eh? But I'll fix you!"

But he only said so. Professor Rácz had a stern countenance, but he was a lovable soul.

"You may sit down!" he said to the boy who happened to be answering questions; then he began to glance through his notebook.

At such times there was always unusual silence in the classroom. Even those well prepared dared not budge; and rigidly, as though fascinated, watched the professor's fingers turning the small pages. Some of the boys actually knew on what page their names were. When the professor happened to be turning the back pages, it was time for those of A and B initials to rejoice. Then if he suddenly switched back to

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the front of the roster, there would be great elation among those whose initials were R, S or T.

Professor Rác continued to peruse this fateful notebook, then quietly called:

"Nemecsek."

"He is not here!" thundered the whole class. One voice, a well known Paul Street voice, added:

"He is sick."

"What's the matter with him?"

"He caught cold."

Professor Rác surveyed the entire class and merely remarked:

"Because you don't watch yourselves."

But the Paul Streeters quickly glanced at each other. They knew right well how and why Nemecsek had not watched himself. They were scattered throughout the room, some sitting in the front row, others in the third; in fact, Csónakos, alas, was in the last row. But now they all looked at each other. Every little face clearly conveyed the information that this boy, Nemecsek, caught cold while performing a noble deed. Plainly speaking, poor little Nemecsek caught cold for his *country*. He had suffered three duckings. Once by accident, once

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as a matter of honor, and once because of compulsion. And not for the whole world would anyone have revealed this great secret, although by now it was known to everyone, even to members of the Putty Club. Indeed, within the club there was now a movement afoot to eradicate Nemecsek's name from the black book; but for the time being they could not agree upon the proper procedure. They did not know whether they ought first to replace the small letters with capitals and then obliterate the entry, or whether to erase it without further ado. But since Kolnay, who was still president, said that the name ought to be removed from the black book at once, it was only natural that Barabás insisted on forming a clique which contended that the name must first be restored to its original status.

But all this was beside the point now. All interest was centered on the war impending that very day. After the Latin period was over, groups of his classmates accosted Boka, to volunteer their services. Boka's uniform reply was:

"We're very sorry, but we cannot accept your help. We shall defend our country ourselves. If the redshirts happen to be stronger than we are, we'll defeat them by superior cleverness.

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Anyway, whatever may be in store for us, we prefer to do our own fighting."

Interest was so general that not only were there volunteers from other classes but, at one o'clock, when all were rushing homeward to luncheon, even the halvah vendor, who was still at the school gate, offered his services to Boka.

"Young man," he said, "if I join you, I'll drive out the whole lot of them myself!"

Boka smiled:

"Just leave it to us, old fellow!" And he, too, hurried home. Outside the school gate the Paul Street Boys were surrounded by their classmates and were given all sorts of useful advice. There were those who even explained to them how to trip up the other fellow. Others were eager to act as spies. Yet others asked for the privilege of being mere spectators of the battle. But no such requests were granted. It was Boka's strict order that, immediately after the start of hostilities, the gate be securely locked; the sentinels were to open the gate only when it became apparent that the enemy was being driven back.

But all this chatting lasted only a few minutes. The boys dispersed, for exactly at two o'clock they had to be back on the *grund*. At a quarter after one the whole vicinity was de-

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served. Even the confectionery vendor was packing up his wares and the school janitor in front of the gate was quietly puffing at his pipe, hurling an occasional scoffing remark at the vendor:

"I'll bet," he said, "you ain't going to last long in this neighborhood. We'll make you clear out with all that rubbish!"

But the vendor deigned him no reply; he only shrugged his shoulders. He regarded himself much above his tormentor. He wore a red fez and would not stoop to speak to a mere school janitor. Especially aloof was he whenever, as in the present instance, the janitor happened to be speaking the truth.

At two o'clock sharp, when Boka, wearing a cap symbolic of the Paul Street colors, appeared at the *grund* gate, the whole army was in military formation in the center of the vacant lot. Everyone was present, except Nemecsek, who was sick abed at home. That was why, on the very day of battle, the Paul Street army was destitute of its private. All those present were commissioned officers. The one private, the real army, was at home, lying ill in a tiny bed within a little house in a garden on Rákos Street.

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Boka tackled his task without delay. In a military tone he cried out:

"Attention!"

The whole formation stood at attention. Then Boka's voice rang out again:

"I want to announce that I hereby give up the rank of president because that is only for peace time. We are now in a state of war, therefore I am taking on the rank of general."

All were deeply affected at that moment. And it really was an inspiring, a fairly historic moment when, on the day of war, at a time of the greatest possible danger, Boka took unto himself the title of general. Then he added:

"And now, for the last time, I'll repeat our war plans, so that there can be no misunderstanding later."

Boka went over all that which he had told them the day before and, though most of them had already committed everything to memory, they listened with close attention. When he was through, the general issued this curt command:

"All take your places!"

The line quickly dispersed; only Csele, dapper Csele, remained at the side of Boka. He was substituting, as adjutant, for Nemecsek. There was a brass bugle dangling from his waist which

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had been bought for a *forint* and forty *kraj-cárs*. In this sum was included twenty-six *kraj-cárs*, representing all the assets of the Putty Club. The Commander-in-chief had simply confiscated it for military purposes.

It was a lovely little postman's trumpet which sounded just like an army bugle. This instrument served three purposes. It heralded the coming of the enemy, gave the signal for attack, and called the army to main headquarters. These signals, too, had been rehearsed the day before.

The sentinel who, in keeping with his orders, sat atop the fence with one leg hanging over on the Paul Street side, now cried:

"General!"

"Well, what is it?"

"I beg to report, sir, that a servant girl wishes to enter the *grund*. She has a letter in her hand."

"Whom does she want?"

"She says she is looking for the general."

Boka strode over to the fence:

"Take a good look at her, see whether it isn't one of the redshirts in disguise sent here to spy on us."

The sentinel leaned far out into the street, so that he almost lost his balance. He reported:

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"Sir, I beg to report, that I looked at her well. She is a real lady."

"If that's the case, she may come in."

The gate was opened. The "real lady" entered and gazed about the *grund*. What a real lady! She must have just left her task of scrubbing the kitchen, for she had house slippers on her feet.

"I brought this letter from Mr. Geréb," she said. "The young master said it is very urgent and that I'm to wait for an answer."

Boka opened the letter, which was addressed to "The Honorable President, Mr. Boka" and in reality was not a letter but a whole packet containing all sorts of paper. There was plain composition paper, correspondence paper, a piece of initialed paper out of his sister's stationery, a foolscap—all of it closely filled with scrawled writing and each page carefully numbered. This is what the letter said:

"Dear Boka!

I know that you don't care to have much to do with me, not even in writing, yet I have decided to make another try before breaking our ties altogether. I now realize not only how wrong I was but that you boys deserved far better of me, because you behaved so wonder-

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fully to my dad, especially Nemecsek who denied that I betrayed you all. Father was so proud of the discovery that I was not a traitor that he immediately bought me Jules Verne's 'The Mysterious Island' which I've long been wanting. He got it for me to make me feel good. I immediately took the book to Nemecsek as a present, though I didn't read it, and I so would have liked to. Next day dad said to me: 'Where's the book, you scamp?' and I didn't know what to answer, so dad said: 'You ne'er-do-well, you sold it to the antiquarian! Just you wait, you'll never get anything from me again!' And he's started to keep his promise already because I've had no luncheon. But I don't care. If poor Nemecsek has had to suffer innocently for my sake, I am glad to suffer a little innocently on his account. I'm telling you this only as something incidental, this is not the chief thing. While in school yesterday, where none of you spoke to me, I was thinking of some way to set myself right. And at last I've got an idea. I thought: 'I'll do the right thing in the same way I did the wrong thing. And so, after luncheon, immediately after I left you boys so glum, because you refused to take me back, I went out to the Botanical Gardens in order to get some information for you. I imitated Nemecsek, because I climbed the same tree on the island on which he was once hiding a whole afternoon. Of course, I did this before any of the redshirts arrived. At last, at about four o'clock, they

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came and I heard them cursing me. But that didn't bother me at all because I felt myself to be one of the Paul Street gang, no matter how much you threw me out. You couldn't throw my heart out, which, after all, does beat with yours. And I don't care how much you laugh at me, but I nearly cried with joy when I heard Feri Áts say: 'that fellow Geréb belongs to them all right, he's not a real traitor because it seems that he must have been spying for them all the time.' Then they held a special meeting and I listened to every word that was said. They said that, since Nemecek had found out all their plans, they could not go to war today, because you fellows are all prepared. So they decided to have the battle the next day. And there was another sly scheme about which they spoke in such low tone that I had to climb down a couple of branches to hear them. But as I did so, they heard the rattling of the twigs and Wendauer said: 'Maybe that fellow Nemecek is up the tree again.' But that was meant only as a joke, for luckily they didn't look up, and even if they had looked up they wouldn't have seen me because I was among some very thick foliage. Anyway, they decided that they would attack tomorrow in the same way as you know about it through Nemecek. Feri Áts said: 'Those guys now think that, because Nemecek heard everything, we'll change our war plans. But we won't, just because they'll be expecting us in some other way.' That's what they decided. Then they had their

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drills and I sat all curled up in that tree until half past six in the greatest of danger. For you can imagine what would have happened, if I'd been caught. I could hardly hold on any longer. I guess if they hadn't left when they did, I'd have become so weak that I'd have dropped off like some ripe peach right down among them. And you know I'm no peach, nor was that a peach tree. But this is only said in jest. The main thing is what I told you before. So at half past six, when the island was deserted, I climbed off the tree and went home. After supper, I had to burn the candle cramming Latin, because I'd lost the whole afternoon. Dear Boka, I have only one request to make. Please believe that everything I said here is true, and don't think that I'm lying so as to mislead you boys, as some redshirt spy. . . . I'm telling you all this because I do want to get back among you and I want to deserve your forgiveness. I'll be a loyal soldier of your army. I won't even mind if you take away my commission. I'll gladly be a private. You have no private now anyway because Nemecek is sick, which leaves only Janó's dog. But that's only a war dog and I'm at least human. If you'll forgive me this once and take me back, I'll come right away to take part in the battle today. I'm sure I'll be able to distinguish myself in the heat of fighting. And that ought to undo all my mistakes. I beg of you to send word with Mary whether I should come to you or not. If you say yes, I'll be there in a jiffy be-

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cause, while Mary is there on the *grund* with you, I'm out here at No. 5 Paul Street, waiting in the hallway for your reply. I remain your true friend

Geréb"

When Boka finished reading this letter, he felt that Geréb was not lying and that he was really worthy of being taken back. So he beckoned to his adjutant, Csele.

"Adjutant Csele," Boka said, "you will blow signal number three on your bugle, which means that everybody must come to the general."

"What's the answer, please?" asked Mary.

"You wait here a while, Mary," replied the general in a commandatory tone.

And the little bugle blared forth, at the resonant sound of which the boys timidly emerged from behind the woodpiles. They were puzzled by the call. But, seeing that their general stood calmly at his post, they ventured out and in another minute the entire army stood in formation as before. Boka read to them Geréb's letter, asking:

"Shall we take him back?"

And the boys—they were, after all, good boys—unanimously said:

"Yes."

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Boka turned to the maid, saying:

"Tell him to come right on. That's the answer."

Mary was bewildered by the whole thing—the army, the red and green caps, the weapons. . . . Then she trundled out the little gate.

"Richter!" shouted Boka, after they were left alone. Richter stepped out of line.

"I'll assign Geréb to you," said the general, and you'll watch him. At the first suspicious move you'll immediately arrest him and shut him up in the shack. But I don't think that will be necessary. Yet it's always well to be a little cautious. At ease! There will be no war today, as you can see from this letter. Everything that was planned for today will be carried out tomorrow. If they don't change their plans, our own will remain the same."

He was about to continue when the gate, which had not been closed after the maid, was kicked in and Geréb, his face aglow with joy, bounded in like one who has been admitted to the Land of Promise. But, upon seeing the entire army, his countenance grew serious. He stepped up to Boka and, amid general attention, raised a hand to his cap. He wore the regula-

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tion red and green cap of the Paul Street Boys. He saluted and said:

"General, I am at your service, sir!"

"Good," said Boka, without any ceremony. "You've been assigned to Richter—as private, for the time being. I'll see how you'll behave on the day of battle, then you may regain your rank."

With that he turned to the army:

"I strictly forbid you all to say anything to Geréb about his offense. He wants to make good his sin, which we forgive him. Mind you, not a word of reproach! And I forbid him also to mention the subject, which is now closed."

In the silence that followed the boys thought within themselves:

"Boka sure is a smart boy. He deserves to be our general."

Richter immediately set to work to explain to Geréb what his duties in war would be. Boka was conversing with Csele. And as they were thus quietly chatting, the sentinel, who was still astride the fence, suddenly drew back his right leg, which had been dangling on the outside. His face reflected alarm as he stammered:

"General Boka . . . the enemy is approaching!"

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With lightning rapidity Boka leaped to the gate, bolting it. Everyone looked at Geréb, who was deathly pale as he stood beside Richter. Boka shouted at him in rage:

"So you lied, after all?! Again you lied!"

Geréb was thunderstruck. Richter grabbed his arm.

"What does this mean?!" roared Boka.

Finally Geréb stammered something with great difficulty:

"Maybe . . . maybe they did see me on the tree . . . and decided to mislead me this way. . . ."

The sentinel peeped across the fence again, then jumped off, shouldered his gun and took his place in line among the others.

"The redshirts are coming," he announced.

Boka went to the gate and opened it. Boldly he stepped just outside the gate. True enough, the redshirts were coming. But there were only three of them. The two Pásztor boys and Szebenics. Upon espying Boka, Szebenics drew a white flag from under his jacket and waved it at Boka. He called from a distance:

"We're messengers!"

Boka went back to the *grund*. He felt

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ashamed of himself to have accused Geréb so readily. He said to Richter:

"Release him. They're only messengers with a white flag. Forgive me, Geréb."

Poor Geréb breathed with relief. He had nearly got in wrong—quite innocently, at that. But the sentinel was reprimanded, too.

"And you," Boka shouted at him, "had better make sure what you are talking about before you cry 'Thief'! Damned scary jackass, you!" Then he commanded:

"To the back! All of you. Get in among the woodpiles. Only Csele and Kolnay remain here with me. March!"

The army marched off in true military fashion and soon vanished—together with Geréb—among the woodpiles. The last red-green cap disappeared just as there was a knock on the gate. The adjutant opened it and the enemy's messengers entered. All three of them wore red shirts and red caps. They came unarmed, and Szebenics held the white flag high in the air.

Boka knew exactly what was proper at a time like this. He took his spear and placed it against the fence, so as not to be armed. Csele and Kolnay mutely followed suit; indeed Csele went

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so far in his zeal that he removed the bugle, too, and placed it on the ground.

The elder Pásztor stepped forward:

"Have I the honor to speak to the Commander-in-chief?"

Csele replied:

"Yes. He is the General."

"We are here on a mission," said Pásztor, "and I am the spokesman. We have come on behalf of our Commander-in-chief, Feri Áts, to declare war upon you."

At the mention of their chief's name, the deputation saluted. Boka and his aides, out of sheer courtesy, also touched their caps. Pásztor continued:

"We don't want to surprise the enemy. We'll be here at three o'clock sharp. This is all we wanted to say. Let us have your answer."

Boka realized that this was a momentous occasion. His voice slightly quavered as he replied:

"We accept your challenge. But I'd like to have something clearly understood. I would not like to see this develop into a fist fight."

"Neither would we," said Pásztor sullenly and, as was his wont, rested his chin on his chest.

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"I insist," Boka went on, "that there be altogether only three ways of fighting. Sand bombs, scientific wrestling and fencing with spears. You are familiar with the regulations, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Anyone whose both shoulders touch the ground will be considered licked and cannot wrestle again. But the same fellow has the privilege of participating in the other two ways of fighting. Is that agreeable?"

"Yes."

"And the spears must not be used either for hitting or for stabbing. Only for fencing."

"That's right."

"And two must not attack one. But troops against troops,—regardless of number—may do so. Do you accept?"

"We do."

"Then I have nothing more to say."

Boka saluted. Csele and Kolnay, standing at attention, did likewise. The deputation returned the courtesy and Pásztor spoke up again:

"I have a question to ask. Our chief has entrusted me with making inquiries concerning the condition of Nemecsek. We have heard that he is sick. If so, we are instructed to pay him a

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visit. He behaved so bravely at the time he called on us on the island that we respect him highly."

"He lives on Rákos Street. Three is the house number. He is really very sick."

This was followed by a silent salute. Szebenics raised the white flag aloft again, Pásztor called out: "March!" and the mission marched out through the gate. Outside they still heard the blare of the little bugle which brought the army around the general again, so as to be told of what had transpired.

The trio of redshirts swiftly marched off toward Rákos Street. They halted in front of the house in which Nemecsek lived. They asked a little girl at the gateway:

"Is there a party by the name of Nemecsek living in this house?"

"Yes," said the little girl and led them to the entrance of a poorish flat on the ground floor, in which Nemecsek lived. Outside the door there was a small blue sign bearing the inscription: "András Nemecsek, Tailor."

The boys entered and politely communicated the purpose of their visit. Nemecsek's mother, an emaciated little blonde woman who bore a striking resemblance to her son—or vice versa—

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led them into the room where the private of the Paul Street Boys lay in bed. Here, too, Szebenics raised the white flag high. And here, too, Pásztor acted as spokesman:

"Feri Áts sends you his greetings and hopes that you will be well soon."

The sandy little fellow, who was pale and disheveled, sat up in bed. He smiled happily and his first question was:

"When will the war be?"

"Tomorrow."

That saddened him.

"It means that I can't be there," he said ruefully.

The enemy's mission had nothing to say to this. One by one they shook hands with Nemecsek and the grim, fierce-looking Pásztor seemed deeply moved as he said:

"And I ask for your forgiveness."

"I forgive you," said Nemecsek quietly and began to cough. He lay back on the pillow and Szebenics tucked it well under his head. Then Pásztor said:

"And now we must go."

Once again the flag-bearer raised the white bunting and all three of them went out into the

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kitchen. There Nemecsek's mother said with tears in her eyes:

"You are all . . . such fine, lovely boys . . . because you show so much love for my poor little son. For that . . . for that . . . all three of you will now get a cup of cocoa. . . ."

The three members of the mission looked at each other. It was most alluring, this prospect of cocoa. Nevertheless, the spokesman stepped forward and this time he did not lower his handsome dark head over his chest, but raised it and proudly said:

"We don't expect any cocoa for that, ma'am. March!"

And they trooped out.



CHAPTER EIGHT

The day of battle was a lovely Spring day. It rained in the morning and at school, during recess, the boys gazed woefully through the windows. They were afraid that the rain might spoil their plans. But along about noon, the rain subsided and the skies grew beautifully clear. By one o'clock the sweet Spring sun shone in all its radiance, the streets were dry and, as the boys wended their way homeward, the air was quite warm; from the hills of Buda the breezes wafted fresh fragrances. It was the best possible war weather. The sand in the fortresses had also become damp in the rain, but it dried slightly, so that their bombs were so much more usable.

At one o'clock all were eager to rush home, and at a quarter of two the whole tumultuous army was back on the *grund*. Some of the boys

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brought parts of their luncheon in their pockets and were nibbling. Yesterday they had been uncertain as to what would happen, but the enemy's messengers dispelled their excitement, which was supplanted by earnest anticipation. Now they knew when to expect the foe and what sort of a fracas it would be. Their blood was throbbing with a readiness to give battle, and they were aching to be in the thick of the fray. During the last half hour preceding hostilities Boka suddenly made certain changes in his plans. As the boys gathered, they were surprised to note that a deep and wide ditch had been dug along fortresses 4 and 5. Those timorously inclined immediately thought it was the enemy's doing; they besieged Boka:

"Did you see the ditch?"

"I did."

"Who made it?"

"Janó did it this morning at my orders."

"What's it for?"

"It will alter our plans a bit."

Boka looked at his notes and called for the commanders of divisions A and B:

"Do you see that ditch?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know what a trench is?"

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They were not certain.

"A trench," said Boka, "is intended as a hiding place for the army. It is from a trench that, at the proper moment, the army begins its fight. Our plans have been changed. You fellows will not be at the Paul Street gate. I decided that it would not have been wise. You and your entire divisions will hide in that trench. When this flank of the enemy will have entered through the Paul Street gate, the fortresses will immediately start bombarding. The enemy will head for the fortresses because they will not see the trench there. After coming within five paces of the trench, you will stick your heads out of the ditch and will suddenly begin to pelt them with sand bombs. Meanwhile the fortresses will continue to fire at them. Then you fellows will dash out of the trench and throw yourselves at the enemy. You will not drive them out immediately; wait until we're finished with their forces on Maria Street. Only when you hear our bugler signal to charge must you chase them toward the gate. By the time we have driven our adversaries into the shack, the troops of fortresses 1 and 2 will dash across to join their comrades in the other fortresses, then our boys from Maria Street will hurry to help

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you. In other words, you'll merely keep them at bay. Understand?"

"Sure."

"That's when I'll give the signal to charge. There will be twice as many of us as of them because half of their army will have been bottled up in the shack by then. There is nothing in the regulations against our being in greater number during such a movement. Only in individual combat is it forbidden for two to attack one."

As Boka finished speaking, Janó went over to the trench and with a hoe put the finishing touches on it. Then in a wheel-barrow he brought more sand to fill out the dents.

In the meantime those manning the fortresses were sedulously at work, they were busy on top of the woodpiles. The fortresses were so constructed that only the boys' heads could be seen behind the logs. Their heads were bobbing up and down as they vied with one another in the making of sand bombs. Upon the ridge of every fortress a red-green bunting fluttered in the air; only number 3 on the corner was without a flag. The missing bunting was the one carried off by Feri Áts. This had not been

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replaced because they were resolved to recapture the missing flag.

Noble enough, but we all recall that this bunting of so much vicissitude was last seen in the hands of Geréb. First it was Feri Áts who took it away, and the redshirts kept it in some ruins of the Botanical Gardens. Thence it was carried off by Nemeček, whose tiny footprints were discovered in the dust. Then, on that memorable evening when the blond little fellow suddenly dropped in—literally—on the redshirts, the Pásztor boys wrenched the flag from his hands and once more it found its way among the tomahawks in the secret arsenal of the redshirts. Then, the last time, it was Geréb who fetched it as a peace offering to the Paul Street Boys. But Boka frankly told him at the time that they would have nothing to do with such a flag. They preferred to recapture it with honor.

And so, the day before, soon after the red-shirted deputation had departed, the Paul Street Boys had despatched a deputaton of their own to carry the much contested flag back to the Botanical Gardens. This mission arrived on the island just as the enemy was in the midst of a grave war council. Csele was the spokesman, with Weisz and Csónakos as the other members.

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Csele had a white flag, while the red-green flag, wrapped in newspaper, was carried by Weisz.

At the wooden bridge they were confronted by the guard:

"Halt, who goes there?"

Csele drew the white flag from under his jacket and held it high. But he did not say a word. The guard did not seem to know how to proceed, so one of them called out:

"Hip, hip, hurrah! There are strangers out here!"

Thereupon Feri Áts himself went to the bridge. He knew the meaning of a white flag; he admitted the deputation.

"Are you boys here on a mission?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

Csele stepped forward:

"We've brought back this flag, which you took from us. It was in our possession again, but we don't want it this way. Bring it with you to the battlefield tomorrow and we'll try to take it away from you. If we fail, it will be yours. That's the message of our general."

He motioned to Weisz, who unwrapped it with a great deal of fuss and kissed it before handing it over.

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"Szebenics!" cried Áts.

"Not present!" said a voice from behind some trees.

Csele spoke up:

"He was just over at our headquarters."

"That's right," commented Áts. "I forgot all about that. Well, then, let the assistant keeper of the arms come forth."

One of the bushes suddenly parted and agile little Wendauer hurried up to his chief.

"Take charge of this flag," he said, "and put it in the arsenal."

Then he turned to the Paul Street boys:

"Szebenics will carry the flag to war tomorrow. That is my answer."

Csele was about to raise the white flag, in a token of farewell, when the redshirts' chief spoke up again:

"I suppose it was Geréb who took the flag back to you."

There was no reply.

Áts put the question:

"Was it Geréb?"

Csele snapped into attention:

"I have no authority to tell you!" he said, then called to his companions:

"Attention! For—ward! Ma-a-rch!"

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And he left the enemy chief. No wonder Csele was known to be a fop. Not for nothing had he the reputation of being dapper. This gesture on his part was truly elegant and soldierly. He was unwilling to betray even a traitor to the enemy.

At that moment Feri Áts felt slightly bested. Wendauer stood before him with the flag in his hand and gaping. Enraged, his chief shouted at him:

"What're you staring at! Put that flag where it belongs!"

Wendauer slunk off, thinking: "I'll bet those Paul Street boys are swell kids! That's the second one of them who's put one over on Terrible Feri Áts!"

That is how the red-green flag found its way back to the redshirts. And that is why fortress number 3 was without a flag.

The sentinels were perched upon the fence. One sat astride the fence on Maria Street, the other on Paul Street. Now from behind the woodpiles, out of this bustle and flurry, stepped the figure of Geréb. He hurried over to Boka, stopped and clicked his heels:

"General, I beg to say that I have a request to make."

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"What is it?"

"Sir, you ordered me to take charge of the battery in number 3 because it's at the corner and the most dangerous spot. Also because its flag is missing, the one that I brought back here once."

"Yes. And what is it you want?"

"I want to ask to be put somewhere where it's even more dangerous. In fact, I have already changed places with Barabás, whom you had assigned to trench duty. He is a good pitcher and can be just as well used in the fortress. And I want to fight in the open, right from the first line trench. Please allow me to do so."

Boka looked him over and said:

"Geréb, you're a fine boy, at that."

"Then you'll grant it?"

"Yes."

Geréb saluted, but remained where he stood.

"What now?" asked the general.

"I just wanted to say," replied the cannoneer with some embarrassment, "that it made me feel good to hear you say 'You're a fine boy, Geréb.' But it hurt to have you put it as you did—'You're a fine boy, *at that.*'"

Boka smiled:

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"I can't help that. It is your fault. But quit being sentimental now. About face, march! Go back to your place."

Geréb marched off. Joyously he crawled into the trench and lost no time in making bombs out of the damp sand. A grimy figure crawled out of the trench. It was Barabás. He called to Boka:

"Did you allow it?"

"I did!" called back the commander-in-chief.

Evidently they were still dubious about this boy Geréb. That is the fate of the disloyal. He is checked up even when telling the truth. But the general's ready acquiescence dispelled every vestige of doubt. Barabás clambered up to the top of the corner fortress and those below clearly saw him saluting and reporting for duty to the commander up there. Next minute both heads vanished behind the parapet. They, too, became busy piling the bombs into pyramids.

Thus several minutes passed by. To the boys these minutes were like so many hours. Their impatience grew apace, so that exclamations such as these were heard:

"Maybe they changed their minds."

"They're yellow!"

"They were only fourflushing!"

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"They won't come!"

Soon after two o'clock, the adjutant galloped all over the place with orders against the slightest sound and to be at "attention" because the general was about to make his final tour of inspection. The adjutant had scarcely delivered his message at the last position when Boka appeared at the first. He was silent and grave. First he reviewed the Maria Street army. There he found everything shipshape. The two divisions stood rigidly lined up at each side of the gate. The commanding officers stepped forward.

"Very good," said Boka. "Do you know your duties?"

"Yes, sir. We are to pretend to be on the run."

"Then . . . a rear attack!"

"Yes, general."

Then he examined the shack. He opened the door and stuck the big rusty key into the lock outside, turning it a few times to be sure that it worked. After that Boka inspected the first three fortresses. There were two men in each, with a goodly supply of sand bombs pyramided. Number three had three times as many bombs as the others. This was the principal stronghold.

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Here—at sight of the general—three gunners snapped into attention. Reserve bombs were stored in fortresses 4, 5 and 6.

“Don’t touch these,” said Boka, “because this reserve sand may be needed by the cannoneers from the other fortresses—if I should order them to come here.”

“Yes, sir.”

In number 5 the tension was so great that when the generals arrived an overzealous gunner called out:

“Halt! Who goes there?”

The other fellow nudged him in the ribs, and Boka called him down:

“Jackass! Don’t you know your own general?” And he added:

“These are the sort of guys it would be best to place before a firing squad at once!”

The flustered gunner was scared to death. For the moment it did not dawn on him that he was not likely to be shot so lightly. Boka himself did not care much that right now—one of the very rare instances—he had said something foolish.

“Boys,” he cried with enthusiasm, “this war depends entirely on you. If you can keep the enemy in check while your comrades on the

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Maria Street side do their bit, we are sure to win the battle. And don't you forget it!"

A lusty roar went up from the trench. Those squatting figures down there were ablaze with elation. Funny little figures they were, as they shouted at the top of their voices and waved their caps without rising in the trench.

"Silence!" the general cried. Then he went out to the center of the *grund*. There Kolnay was waiting for him with the bugle in his hand.

"Adjutant!"

"At your command!"

"We must find a point from which we can see the whole field of battle. War lords usually watch the fighting from hilltops. And so we'll climb to the roof of the shack."

In less than a minute they were perched on top of the shack. The sunbeams were brightly reflected on the bugle and this lent a particularly martial appearance to the adjutant. The cannoneers in the various fortresses called each other's attention to it:

"Look. . . ."

And now out of Boka's pocket came the same opera-glasses that figured so prominently in the Botanical Gardens. He slung the strap across his shoulder and at this moment, except perhaps

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for some slight external differences, he was like the great Napoleon. There was no denying the fact that he was a war lord. And thus they waited.

To the historian exactness of time is of great consequence. Therefore, we wish to chronicle that exactly six minutes later the blare of a bugle was heard on the Paul Street side. Thereupon all the divisions grew fidgety.

"They're coming!" went the word from mouth to mouth.

Boka turned slightly pale.

"Now!" said he to Kolnay. "Now will be decided the fate of our domain."

A few minutes later both sentinels jumped off the fence and ran toward the shack, on the roof of which was the general. They stopped and saluted:

"The enemy is coming!"

"To your post!" cried Boka, and the two guards dashed away to their places. One went into the trench, the other joined the Maria Street forces. Boka raised the glasses to his eyes and quietly said to Kolnay:

"Put the bugle to your lips."

Kolnay did as he was told. Then Boka sud-

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denly removed the glasses, his face became flushed and, in a jubilant voice, he said:

"Blow it!"

And the bugle's blare rent the air. The red-shirts stopped at both gates of the domain. The sun rays sparkled upon the tips of their tin-foiled spears; in their red shirts and red caps they looked like red demons. Their bugles, too, sounded the signal for attack; and now the air was surcharged with bugle blasts. Kolnay blew his incessantly; not for a second would he stop.

"Ta . . . tra . . . tratra . . ." came its peals from the roof of the shack.

Boka's glasses were now searching for Feri Áts. He exclaimed:

"There he is . . . Feri Áts came with the troops sent to attack on the Paul Street side . . . Szebenics is with him, too . . . he's carrying our flag . . . Our Paul Street army will have a tough time of it!"

The elder Pásztor was leading those coming along Maria Street. Their red flag was unfurled. And the three bugles kept up their blare. The red-shirts stood at the gate, their ranks in close formation.

"They're up to something," said Boka.

"That's all right!" replied his adjutant, inter-

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rupting himself for a moment. But immediately thereafter he resumed blowing his trumpet with tireless lungs:

"Tata . . . tra . . . trara . . ."

Then the enemy's bugles came to a sudden stop. Their Maria Street forces burst into an exultant war cry:

"Hip, hip, hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

And they dashed through the gate. Our own boys met them head-on for a moment, as if ready to give them battle. But next minute they turned and ran in wild confusion, as had been prescribed by their war plans.

"Bravo!" Boka cried. Then he suddenly looked toward Paul Street. Feri Áts's army . . . did not enter through the gate. There they stood, at the gate in the street, as if rooted to the spot.

Boka felt some misgivings:

"What's the meaning of this?"

"It's a trap," said Kolnay, trembling. Then they looked to the left again. Our boys were still on the run and redshirts were bellowing at their heels. Boka, who had until now watched with some gravity and alarm the inactivity of Feri Áts's personal army, suddenly did something unprecedented in his youthful career. He

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flung his cap in the air, shouted with all his might and began to dance on top of the shack, as though he had lost his senses, and danced so vigorously that the rickety roof almost caved in under his feet.

"We're saved!" he cried, then fell upon Kolnay, embracing and kissing him; he also insisted on dancing with him. Poor adjutant did not know what was happening; in utter astonishment, he asked:

"What's the matter? What is it?"

Boka pointed toward where Feri Áts and his army stood motionless:

"Do you see that?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, don't you understand?"

"Not I."

"Oh, you stupid . . . we're saved! They're licked! And you don't see it?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you see them standing motionless?"

"Of course, I do."

"They're not coming in . . . they're waiting."

"Yes, I see that."

"Why do you think they're waiting? What for? They are waiting for Pásztor's army to get

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through in Maria Street. Only after that will they attack. I saw that immediately as it became clear that they will not attack jointly! It is our good luck that their war plans are just like ours. Their aim is to have Pásztor drive our boys out of Maria Street and then they will attack the other half together—Pásztor from the rear and Feri Áts in front. But they have another thought coming! Come on!”

And Boka began climbing off the roof.

“Where are you going?”

“Just you come along. There is nothing to look for up here, because those fellows aren’t going to budge. Let’s go to help our Maria Street army!”

The troop on Maria Street did its duty admirably. The boys ran all over the place in front of the machine hut and around the mulberry trees. They did it craftily, too, for one heard them crying:

“Ouch! Ouch!”

“We’re done for!”

“We’re lost!”

The redshirts kept chasing them amid deafening cries. Boka was now interested chiefly in seeing whether the enemy would fall into the trap set by the Paul Street Boys. For suddenly

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our boys disappeared behind the buzz-saw. Half the army ran into the wagon-shed, the other half into the shack. Pásztor issued these orders:

"After them! Capture them!"

And the redshirts dashed madly behind the hut.

"Blow your bugle!" cried Boka to Kolnay.

"And the little bugle pealed forth again, signalling for the fortresses to start cannonading. From the first three fortresses came the triumphant shout of piping childish voices. Dull thuds were heard. Sand bombs began to fly in the air. Boka was flushed, his whole body aquiver.

"Adjutant!" he cried.

"Yes, sir."

"Rush to the trench and tell them to sit tight. Let them wait. They're not to do anything until I give the signal to attack. And the Paul Street fortresses are to wait, too!"

The adjutant was on his way. Upon nearing the shack, he threw himself on the ground and crept on his stomach until he reached the trench. He did this in order not to be seen by the inactive enemy at the gate. He whispered his orders down to the soldier at the extreme end and

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then, as silently as he came, crawled back to his commander.

"All's well," he reported.

The air behind the hut was filled with an uproar. The redshirts were under the impression that they were victorious. But the three fortresses kept up a vigorous bombardment and this prevented them from scaling any of the fortifications. In number three, the famous outermost fortress, Barabás was in shirt sleeves, fighting like a lion. He concentrated on making a target of the elder Pásztor boy. The soft sand bombs flew in quick succession at the dark head of Pásztor. And with every bomb went this message:

"Take that, old kid!"

The sand filled Pásztor's eyes and mouth and made him sneeze in rage.

"I'm coming to you! Just you wait!" he roared.

"Come right on!" cried Barabás, then took aim and threw another bomb. That filled the red-shirted lad's mouth again. Great was the cheering in all fortresses.

"Have another loaf!" continued Barabás, immensely enjoying himself. With both hands he rained the rest of the bombs upon Pásztor. Nor

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were his companions inclined to be lazy. The corner fortress was a joy to behold. Meanwhile the infantrymen were mutely huddled together in the shed and in the shack, awaiting orders to attack. The redshirts finally reached the foot of the fortresses and put forth the stiffest sort of fighting. Pásztor issued fresh instructions:

"Up to the woodpiles!"

"Bang!" cried Barabás, and pitched another bomb straight at the red chief's nose.

"Bang!" roared the other fortresses, adopting the same battle cry, and threw a veritable shower of sand upon those trying to climb up from below.

Boka clutched Kolnay's arm.

"The sand is running low," he said, "I can see it from here. Even Barabás is using only one hand, though that corner fortress had three times as much sand as the others. . . ."

And it really began to appear as though our bombardments were on the wane.

"What'll we do?" asked Kolnay.

Boka regained his calmness:

"We'll be victorious!"

Just then fortress number 2 stopped firing. They were manifestly out of sand.

"This is the right moment!" Boka cried.

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"Run over to the shed and tell them to attack!"

He himself sprang to the shack, flung the door open and cried:

"Charge!"

And the two divisions made their charge simultaneously. They were in the nick of time. Pásztor had managed to plant one foot inside fortress 2. But these fresh boys seized hold of him and dragged him back. The redshirts were disconcerted. All along they had thought that the running army was sheltered behind the woodpiles and that the fortresses were intended to keep the enemy from getting among the woodpiles. But, lo and behold, they were suddenly being attacked by the very army which had been running away from them only a short while before. . . .

War correspondents, who have participated in wars, contend that the greatest danger is confusion. Army heads are not nearly so afraid of hundreds of guns as of a slight confusion which, often within a few moments, may develop into general disorder. And, since armies properly armed may be dangerously weakened by confusion, how could one expect a few little foot-soldiers, dressed in red gym-shirts, to avoid this pitfall?

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They were at sea. At first it did not even occur to them that these were the same boys who, only a short while ago, had vanished before their own eyes. They thought it was fresh troops. Only after they recognized some of them did they realize the situation.

"Where the hell did they come from?" shouted Pásztor, as two powerful hands clutched his leg and dragged him off the fortress. Boka, too, was in the fight. He singled out a red-shirted lad and engaged him in a wrestling bout. Slowly but cleverly he managed to press his adversary toward the shack. The redshirt, realizing that he was no match for Boka, tripped his foe. Some of the boys on top of the wood-piles happened to be watching this individual combat; now their feelings were outraged, for they sent up a howl:

"It's a shame!"

"He tripped him!"

Boka, though tripped, was not down long. He quickly sprang up and cried:

"You're not fighting fairly! You know tripping is against the rules!"

He motioned to Kolnay and the two of them carried the kicking redshirt into the shack. Boka locked the door on him; then he panted:

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"He was stupid. If he had wrestled fairly I could not have downed him. As it is, we had the right to tackle him together. . . ."

Again he rushed into the *mêlée*, where most of the boys were paired off. What little sand there was left in the first two fortresses was employed by the cannoneers as "buckshot" against the enemy. The fortresses overlooking Paul Street were silent. It was a case of watchful waiting.

Kolnay was just in the act of wrestling someone when Boka called sharply to him:

"Don't do that! Go tell the boys in one and two to go over to four and five!"

Kolnay elbowed his way through the wrestling mass of humanity and delivered his commander's message. Immediately thereafter the flags from those two fortresses vanished; the boys took them along to their new battle line.

Cries of victory followed in quick succession. But the loudest of these sounded when Csónakos picked up Pásztor, the terrible and invincible Pásztor himself, and carried him toward the shack. The next minute Pásztor's impotent rage was heard banging on the door—on the inside, of course. . . .

This created quite a furore. The redshirts

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began to realize that they were beaten. Their heads were completely beyond control, now that their leader disappeared. Their sole hope now was the possibility that Feri Áts and his division might redeem this disgrace. Meanwhile one red-shirt after the other was being dragged into the shack amid recurrent exultations that must have reached the ears of the motionless foe standing at the threshold of the Paul Street gate.

Feri Áts, who had been pacing up and down in front of his column of soldiers, smiled proudly as he said:

“Do you hear that? We’ll get the signal soon.”

The understanding among the redshirts was that, as soon as Pásztor’s division would have disposed of the enemy at Maria Street, a bugle would convey the information to Áts, then the two together would make a concerted attack. But little Wendauer, Pásztor’s bugler, was now also fuming with rage within the shack; his bugle, stuffed full of sand, quietly reposed among the booty in fortress three. . . .

While this was happening around the hut and shack, Feri Áts calmly urged his army to be at ease:

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"Just you be patient. At the sound of the bugle, we'll rush forward at once!"

But the long-awaited bugle call failed to materialize. The uproar grew weaker and weaker; indeed it sounded as if it came from some enclosed place. . . . And when the two divisions, wearing red-green caps, had pushed the last red-shirt into the shack and when this was followed by the most thunderous sort of triumphant cry, such as the *grund* had never heard, there was a stir of uneasiness among Feri Áts's ranks. The younger Pásztor stepped out of line:

"I think," he said, "something has gone wrong."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because that isn't at all like their cry. I hear all strange voices."

Feri Áts stood up. He, too, had a suspicion that it was the music of strange throats. But he simulated calmness.

"I'm sure there is nothing wrong," he said. "They're merely fighting on the quiet. It's the Paul Streeters who are making all the racket—because they're in trouble."

At this moment, as if to contradict Feri Áts, an unmistakable "Hurrah" came from the Maria Street sector.

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"Great guns!" exclaimed Feri Áts. "That sounded like real cheering." All wrought up, Pásztor said:

"The fellow that's in trouble is not in the habit of cheering! Maybe we oughtn't to be so cocksure that my brother is going to win, after all. . . ."

And Feri Áts, who was a sensible lad, suddenly realized that he had not reckoned rightly. Indeed, he had the feeling that this blunder was costing him utter defeat, for he would now have to tackle—single-handed, as it were—the Paul Street boys. His last hope, the eagerly awaited bugle call, did not blare forth. . . .

But, instead, another blast was sounded. An unknown peal intended to convey to Boka's hosts that the last of the Pásztor warriors was safely behind lock and that an attack was now to be expected from the *grund* region. At the sound of this blast, the Maria Street army sundered in two. One section appeared near the shack, the other at fortress number six. Their clothes were somewhat frayed, but their eyes shone with triumphant joy, and all of them felt invigorated in the heat of a victorious battle.

Feri Áts had no further doubt that Pásztor's army had met defeat. For a moment or two he

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stared defiantly at the two newly arrived divisions, then he suddenly turned to the younger Pásztor, saying with some agitation:

"But if they were beaten, where the hell are they? If they were driven into the street, why don't they hurry up to join us?"

They gazed out upon Paul Street; in fact, Szebenics darted away to Maria Street. But there was no one in sight. A van laden with bricks rolled by, and a few quiet pedestrians.

"Not a soul anywhere!" reported Szebenics in despair.

"What could have happened to them?"

And now he thought of the shack.

"Why, they must have been locked up," he cried, beside himself with rage. "They licked them and locked them inside their shack!"

The contradiction of a while ago now served as a confirmation. A muffled rumbling came from the direction of the shack. The captives were beating the boards with their fists. But in vain. The little shack happened to be partial toward the Paul Street boys this time. It refused to have itself deprived of either a door or any other part. It stoutly withstood all pounding. And the prisoners improvised an infernal concert. They hoped that their racket would

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attract the attention of Feri Áts's army. Poor Wendauer, who had been deprived of his bugle, made a megaphone out of his hands and shouted through it with all his might.

Feri Áts turned to his army.

"Boys," he cried, "Pásztor has lost the war! It is up to us to redeem the honor of the red-shirts! Forward!"

And just as they were, in one solid line, they marched onto the lot and quickstepped into an attack. But Boka was back on the roof of the shack. Kolnay was with him. In a voice that rang clearly above the din and infernal music of those within the shack he cried:

"Blow your bugle! Charge! Fortresses, fire!"

The redshirts rushing headlong toward the trenches suddenly came to a halt. They were under heavy bombardment from four fortresses. For an instant they were blinded by the down-pour of sand.

"Reserves, forward!" cried Boka.

The reserves rushed forward, right into the hurricane of dust, and at the attacking line. The infantry was still idly squatting in the trenches, awaiting its turn. And from the fortresses came bomb after bomb, not infrequently hitting the back of a Paul Street boy.

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"No matter!" they cried. "Forward!"

The result of this violent bombardment was a tremendous dust cloud. Wherever the boys ran out of bombs, they grabbed handfuls of dry sand and cast it at the enemy. In the center of the *grund*, scarcely twenty paces away from the trenches, the two interlocked armies fought a frenzied battle; here and there a red shirt or a red-green cap flashed through the storm of dust.

But our boys were considerably fagged out, while Feri Áts's army was fighting in a rested condition. Occasionally, for a second or two, it appeared as if the combatants were nearing the trenches, which meant that the defenders were unable to hold back the redshirts. But the closer they came the surer was the aim of the cannoneers. Once again Barabás concentrated on the chief. This time it was Feri Áts whom he bombarded.

"Don't you mind them!" he cried. "Gobble them up! Why, they're only sand!"

He stood up there, on the ramparts, like some nimble-handed little gnome, grinning and shouting boisterously while bending down, with lightning-like rapidity, for fresh bombs. Feri Áts's reserves also brought sand along in small bags. But they could not make use of it now because

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all hands were needed in the line of battle. And so they threw the bags away.

Meanwhile the thrilling, heartening sounds of both bugles were heard: Kolnay's from the roof of the shack, the younger Pásztor's from within the writhing mass. They were now only ten paces away from the trenches.

"Now, then, Kolnay," Boka cried, "show them what you can do! Go down into the trenches, never mind the bombs, and blow the alarm down there. Let them begin fireworks and tell them to rush forth when their sand is gone!"

"Yo-ho! Ho!" Kolnay shouted and jumped off the roof. He did not creep now but, with head held high, he ran toward the trench. Boka called after him, but his voice was drowned in the din of infernal revolt beneath his feet and in the continuous bugle calls and noise set up by Feri Áts's hosts. So Boka merely gazed after Kolnay to see whether his message would reach the trenches before the redshirts discovered those in hiding there.

He saw a powerful figure emerge from among the combatants and leap toward Kolnay. The fellow grabbed Kolnay's hand and began to

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wrestle with him. There was frustration in the air. Kolnay could not fulfill his task.

"I'll go myself!" cried Boka in despair, jumping off the shack and running toward the trenches.

"Halt!" roared Feri Áts.

To stop would have meant a physical contest with the redshirts' chief and that seemed rather risky. So Boka kept running toward the trenches.

Feri Áts was at his heels.

"You're a coward!" he called to Boka. "You're running away from me! But I'll get you! Don't you fear!"

And he did overtake him at the very moment when Boka jumped into the trench. He had only time enough to shout:

"Fire!"

Feri Áts encountered a volley of about ten fresh bombs. They covered his red shirt, his red cap and his red face.

"You're a lot of devils!" he cried. "Firing from under the earth, are you?"

By now there was a bomb attack in swing all along the line. Bombs were hurled from the fortresses and from beneath the trenches. There was a veritable sand storm, mingled with fresh

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sounds. The trench itself, hitherto doomed to silence, became articulate. Boka regarded it high time to make a decisive move. He personally stood at the head of the line, barely two paces from which Kolnay was battling with one of the redshirts. Boka stood up on the ledge of the trench and issued his final orders:

"Charge full force! Forward!"

And it really seemed as if a fresh army had emerged from underground. It attacked in quick-step and scrupulously avoided individual combat. In serried ranks this army ran toward the redshirts, repelling them from the trench.

Barabás called down from a fortress:

"No more sand!"

"Come on down, you fellows! Charge!" was Boka's running reply, whereupon hands and feet were seen swarming all over the fortress walls; the cannoneers came down to join their comrades. This was the second compact row and took its place directly behind the others.

Fighting was now on a desperate scale. The redshirts, sensing their impending defeat, did not strictly adhere to rules; these rules were well enough so long as victory was in sight. But now they discarded every formality.

It was a dangerous situation. It gave them

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the upperhand, though numerically there were only half as many of them as of the Paul Street boys.

"To the shack!" howled Feri Áts. "Let's set them free!"

And the whole swaying mass, as if suddenly rolled over, began to press toward the shack. It took the Paul Street boys by surprise. The redshirted host had slipped from their fingers. Like the nail that suddenly bends under a hammer blow, that is how the attacking line suddenly deflected to the left. Feri Áts, charging furiously, ran ahead; the hope of victory was in his voice:

"After me!"

But he suddenly stopped, for at that very moment something seemed to roll up to his feet. A frail childish figure sprang at him from beside the shack. The redshirt chief was taken aback and the fierce warriors behind him piled up against him with a jolt.

The little boy stood before Feri Áts—a lad fully a head smaller than himself. A thin blond child raised its hands in protest. And a childish voice cried out:

"Halt!"

The Paul Street army, which had been some-

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what dismayed by the sudden turn of affairs, now burst into a spontaneous lusty:

“Nemecsek!”

And the sandy little, slim child suddenly picked up big Feri Áts and—with a superhuman effort, born of his feverish temperature and semi-delirium—hurled the surprised leader to the ground in real style.

Then he, too, collapsed, swooning away across the sprawling body of his victim.

This was the last straw to precipitate complete chaos among the redshirts. The fall of their leader was like having their heads chopped off: their doom was sealed. The Paul Street boys took advantage of this momentary headlessness. They clutched each other by the hand, forming a huge chain with which they exerted a terrific pressure upon the enemy, driving them toward the exit.

Feri Áts clambered to his feet and looked about with flashing eyes and flushed, discomfited face. He beat the dust off his clothes and discovered that he had been left alone. His army was being pressed ever backward somewhere near the gate; it was mingled with the triumphant foe, while he stood here alone—and beaten.

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On the ground beside him lay Nemecek.

When the last of the redshirts had been driven through the gate, and the gate closed behind him, the inebriety of victory was reflected on all faces. Incessant cheering and exultation filled the air. Boka came running from the vicinity of the buzz-saw with the janitor at his side. He was bringing water.

Now the entire army turned its attention to the prostrate Nemecek. Deathly silence took the place of jubilation. Feri Áts stood at one side, sullenly watching his conquerors. The captives in the shack were still banging away for dear life.

But who cared about them now?

Janó tenderly raised the inert body of Nemecek, and laid it upon the trench embankment. Then someone applied water to the lad's eyes, forehead and face. A few minutes later Nemecek opened his eyes. Smiling wanly, he looked about; everyone was silent.

"What's happened?" he quietly asked.

But all were so moved that no one thought of answering the question. They looked at him in astonishment.

"What's happened?"

Now Boka went over to him:

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"Do you feel better?"

"Yes."

"Are you hurt?"

"No." He was smiling. Then he asked:

"Did we win?"

That not only broke the silence but moved the whole army to answering in unison. The cry of victory rang from every lip:

"Yes, we won!"

No one seemed concerned about the fact that Feri Áts was still about, standing beside a wood-pile, a grim and resentful witness to this family jubilee of the Paul Street boys.

Boka spoke up again:

"Yes, we won, but we were almost up against it near the end. We owe it to you that things panned out right. If you had not suddenly appeared among us and had not taken Feri Áts by surprise, they might have set our prisoners free, and then only Heaven knows what would have happened."

The blond little fellow seemed piqued at this remark.

"It isn't true," he said. "You're only saying it to make me feel good, because I am sick."

And he smoothed his brow. Now that the blood had returned to his face, now that it was

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flushed again, it was evident that he was being consumed by fever.

"Now," said Boka, "we'll take you right home. It was foolish enough of you to come here. I don't see how your folks permitted it."

"They didn't. But I came anyway."

"How so?"

"My father had gone away to take a suit for try-on. Mother called on a neighbor so as to warm up my *kimmel* soup. She did not lock the door but said that I should holler if I wanted anything. That's how I was left alone. I sat up in bed and listened. But I heard nothing. Yet it seemed as if I did hear something. There was a buzzing in my ears, like the tramping of horses, a bugle, too, and a lot of other sounds. I heard Csele's voice, as if he had been calling: 'Come on, Nemecsek, because we're in trouble!' —Then I heard you crying: 'Don't you come, Nemecsek. We don't want you because you're sick. You were glad enough to come when we played aggies and had all sorts of fun . . . but now that we're fighting and losing the battle you refuse to come!' That's what I heard you say, Boka. Well, then I jumped right out of bed. I keeled over because I had been lying so long that I was very weak. But I managed to get up and

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took my clothes out of the cabinet . . . my shoes, too, and I quickly got dressed. I was all done when mother came back. I heard her steps outside and I threw myself into the bed, clothes and all, and pulled the quilt over myself, way up to my mouth, so that she couldn't see anything. Then mother said: 'I only came to ask if you need anything.' And I said: 'No,' and she went out again. Soon after that I sneaked out of the house. But I am no hero. I didn't know that it was so important. I just came to fight with the rest of you. But when I set eyes on Feri Áts, I suddenly remembered that the reason I couldn't be with you boys was that he had given me a cold ducking. That made me terribly desperate and I said to myself: 'There's your chance, Ernie, now or never,' and I shut my eyes and . . . and . . . tackled him. . . ."

He spoke with so much fervor that it exhausted him. He began to cough.

"Don't say any more," said Boka, "you'll finish it some other time. We're going to take you home now."

After this, with the aid of Janó, they released the prisoners, one by one. All weapons were taken away. Singly and sadly the redshirts

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ambled out of the place via the Maria Street exit. The little black chimney seemed to be puffing and vomiting in derision. Even the buzz-saw shrieked its contemptuous farewell, as if to declare its solidarity with the Paul Street army.

Feri Áts still did not budge. He continued standing against a woodpile, his eyes cast down. Kolnay and Csele stepped over to him in order to deprive him of his arms. But Boka forbade it:

"You mustn't harm the leader."

With that he stepped in front of Feri Áts:

"General," Boka said, "you fought like a hero!"

The red-shirted lad looked mournfully at his captor, as if to say: "A lot of good your praise will do me."

Boka wheeled about and commanded:

"Salute!"

That put an end to all chatter. The Paul Street boys touched their caps. Before them stood Boka, his hand likewise at the edge of his cap. The "Private" in poor Nemecsek was stirred to response. With some effort he rose and, after staggering into a firm position, stood at attention and saluted as best he could. He

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paid tribute to the very fellow who had caused his great illness.

And Feri Áts, after returning these honors, departed, taking his weapons along. He was the only one permitted to do so. The rest of the arms—the notorious silver-tipped spears and Indian tomahawks—lay in front of the shack in a heap. And on fortress number three there fluttered the recaptured flag. It was Geréb who, in the fiercest sort of hand combat, had taken it away from Szebenics.

"Is Geréb here?" inquired Nemecsek with startled eyes.

"Yes," replied Geréb himself, stepping forward.

The sandy youth looked at Boka inquisitively. The latter said:

"Yes, he is back with us and has made good. I hereby restore him to the rank of first lieutenant."

Geréb blushed.

"Thank you," he said. Then quietly he added:

"But. . . ."

"Why the but?"

Geréb seemed a bit confused as he said:

"I know I have no right to do so, because it is

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up to the general, but . . . I think . . . I know that Nemecsek is still a private."

Silence ensued. Geréb was right. In the great excitement everyone had forgotten that he who, for the third time, had saved their reputation, was still a mere private.

"Right you are, Geréb," Boka spoke up. "We'll do something about that right here and now. I hereby appoint. . . ."

But Nemecsek interrupted:

"I don't want you to appoint me . . . I didn't do it for that . . . that's not why I came. . . ."

Boka assumed an air of severity. He shouted at Nemecsek:

"It doesn't matter why you came, what *does* count is the fact that you were here and what you did when you were here. I hereby promote Ernő Nemecsek, to the rank of captain."

"Hurrah!"

The vociferous approval came from all throats. And everyone saluted the new captain—even the first- and second-lieutenants. In fact, the general himself was first among these; his hand flew to his cap with so much vigor and snap that one might have thought their ranks to be reversed.

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Someone suddenly noticed that a poorly-clad little woman was passing behind their line on the *grund*, and now she was in front of them.

"Good Lord!" she cried. "So this is where you are? I thought I'd find you here!"

It was Nemecsek's own mother. She wept because she had been searching everywhere for her sick child, and came here hoping that the boys would be able to give her a clue. The boys surrounded her and tried to calm her. The poor woman tenderly wrapped her shawl around her son's neck and picked him up to take him home.

"Let's see them home!" cried Weisz, who had been quiet until now.

The idea appealed to all of them.

"Yes, let's see her home!" all of them cried, and immediately set to clearing away things. The arms captured as booty were hastily thrown into the shack, then they swarmed after the pathetic little woman, who was hugging her son close to herself so as to infuse the warmth of her own frail body into his blood.

Out on Paul Street the boys broke into a procession of two-abreast, following close behind Nemecsek and his mother. Dusk had flung its mantle over them. The street lamps were being lighted and bright shafts of light from store win-

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dows and doors all about were cast upon the boys.

Passers-by stopped now and then to gape at this strange procession, headed by an emaciated, blond little woman with tearful eyes, pressing close to herself the figure of a little boy of whom only the nose was visible above the big shawl—behind them a host of boys marching two-abreast, in military fashion, and wearing red-green caps.

Others were moved to smile. Here and there a ruffian burst into loud laughter at the spectacle. But the boys did not mind that now. Csónakos himself, who under ordinary circumstances would promptly and forcefully resent all such ridicule, tramped on quite calmly, not heeding at all the flippant remarks of apprentices and the like. It was a moment of such seriousness and solemnity that the boys refused to be perturbed even by the most audacious of roughnecks.

On the other hand, Nemecsek's mother was far too greatly absorbed in her own woes to bother about the army in back of her. But she had to stop perforce upon reaching the gate of her little home on Rákos Street; her son doubled up and refused to be dragged into the house. He

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disengaged himself from his mother's arms and stood up in front of the boys.

"So long," he said.

One by one he shook their hands. His own hand was burning hot. Then, on the arm of his mother, he vanished in the dark gateway. A door was heard being shut in the yard, a light went on in one of the windows. And silence.

Presently it dawned on the boys that none of them had budged away from the house. Not a word was exchanged. They merely peered and stared into the yard, up to that illuminated window behind which the little hero was being put back to bed. Finally one of them heaved a sorrowful sigh. Csele spoke up:

"What now?"

That broke the spell. In pairs and threes they started away along the dark street toward Üllői Avenue. All of them were tired by now, fagged by the strain of battle. A chill wind, a sharp Spring wind, swept the street, wafting from the hilltops the cold breath of melting snow.

One group headed down toward the Francis-town section. In the end only Boka and Csónakos remained in front of the gate. Csónakos was fidgety, waiting for Boka to leave.

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But since the Paul Street chief made no such move, he humbly said:

"Are you coming?"

Boka quietly replied:

"No."

"Going to stay?"

"Yes."

"Well then . . . so long."

And he, too, departed slowly, almost at a shuffling gait. Boka gazed after him and saw him frequently turn his head; then he disappeared around the corner. And Rákos Street, which was much too shy ever to harbor pretensions alongside of strident Üllői Avenue of tram-car distinction, remained hushed in the dark. Only the wind zoomed through it and vigorously shook the panes of the gas-lamps. An occasional gust, more violent than the others, rattled through all of them, as if the quivering, flickering flames were mysteriously signalling to each other. The only human being in the street at that moment was János Boka—the general. And, as General János Boka gazed about him and realized that he was all alone, his heart was so tightly gripped by a strange feeling that János Boka, general, leaned against the gate-post and burst into genuinely bitter, heartfelt tears.

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He, too, felt and knew that which none of them dared utter. He, too, saw how illness was ravaging, menacing with gradual extinction, his poor "Private". He knew what the end would be and that the end was fast approaching. What did he care now about being a victorious war lord, or that for the first time he failed to maintain his manliness? The child in him had gained the upper hand; he merely wept and mumbled to himself:

"My little pal . . . precious little pal . . . sweet little captain of mine. . . ."

A man passed by and harshly said:

"What's the matter, little fellow?"

But Boka did not answer. The man shrugged his shoulders and went away. Then came a poor woman, carrying a big basket. She, too, stopped but did not say anything. She looked at him a while, then went on. After that came a wizened little man and entered through the gate. He looked back and recognized the lad:

"That you János Boka?"

Boka peered at him and said:

"Yes, Mr. Nemecsek."

The little tailor had a suit of clothes on his arm. He had been over in Buda to try on the basted garments. But this man understood

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Boka. He neither asked "What's the matter, little fellow?" nor stared at him, but came back and put an arm around the boy's intelligent little head and fairly vied with him in shedding tears. So much so that it stirred in Boka a sense of generalship.

"Don't cry, Mr. Nemecsek," he said to the tailor.

Nemecsek Sr. wiped his eyes with a fist and made a gesture of mute despair. He seemed to say: "It can't be helped now, anyway. At least I've had some relief in crying."

"God bless you, my boy," said he to the general. "Go home nicely now."

And he re-entered the yard.

Now Boka, too, wiped his eyes and sighed. He gazed about the street and was on the verge of going home. But something seemed to detain him. He knew well that he could not be of help, yet he felt it to be his sacred duty to remain there, to stand as guard-of-honor at the home of his dying little soldier. He paced up and down a few times in front of the gate, then crossed to the opposite side of the street, watching the little house.

Now he heard the sound of footsteps in the silence of the deserted street. "A workman on

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his way home," he thought and, with drooping head, walked along the sidewalk. His head was full of all sorts of queer thoughts, such as had never occurred to him before. Life and death occupied his mind; he could not make head or tail of this great problem.

The footsteps drew closer, but now it seemed as if the person approaching had slowed his pace. Cautiously a black shadow moved near the houses, then stopped in front of the Nemecsek home. It looked through the gate, even entered for a moment and came out again. It stopped. Waited. Then it began to pace up and down in front of the house. As it arrived for the first time in the glare of a gas light, the wind blew apart the tails of its jacket. Boka cast a glance in that direction and saw the flash of a red shirt under the jacket.

It was Feri Áts.

And now the two chieftains stared at each other defiantly. For the first time in their lives, they stood opposite each other, eye to eye. Here they met before this house of sorrow. One was brought here by his heart, the other at the urge of his conscience. They did not say a word, only looked at each other. Then Feri Áts resumed his pacing. He paced for a long, long

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time—until the janitor emerged from the dark yard to lock the gate. Feri Áts went over to him, doffed his hat and quietly asked him something. The janitor's reply also reached Boka's ears. He had said:

"Badly."

And he slammed the big, heavy gate. The clang of this disturbed the silence of the street, then died away like thunder in the mountains.

Feri Áts started off, slowly, to the right. And Boka, too, had to go home. The chill wind howled as one military leader went to the right and the other to the left. But even now they did not speak to each other.

Now the narrow street fell quite asleep in the fresh Spring night. The wind alone stalked through it, haughtily, shaking lamp-panes, snatching at gas jets, and making a weather-cock or two cry out. It blew into every crevice, even into the little room where a poor little tailor sat at a table eating bacon out of a newspaper—his frugal supper—and where on a little bed lay a gasping, delirious little captain with blazing cheeks and burning eyes. This same wind rattled the window panes and fluttered the flame in the kerosene lamp. The little woman covered her child:

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"The wind's blowing hard, my darling."

And the captain, a sad, wan smile on his lips,
whispered:

"Blowing from the *grund* . . . from our
dear, beloved *grund*. . . ."

CHAPTER NINE

PAGES FROM THE BIG BOOK OF THE PUTTY CLUB

Minutes

"At a general meeting today the following resolutions were adopted and ordered recorded in the official big book:

1.

"On page 17 of the big book there is an entry which reads: 'e r n ö n e m e c s e k' in small letters. This is hereby declared void. Because this entry is based on an error, the general meeting hereby acknowledges to have injured said member without justification, and that it is a historical fact that said member manfully suffered this humiliation and fought like a veritable hero in the war. The club, therefore, declares

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that this entry was wholly the fault of the club and the recording-secretary will hereby enter this member's name entirely in capital letters.

2.

"I hereby enter, entirely in capital letters:

ERNÖ NEMECSEK

(Signed) "Leszik, Recording-Secretary.

3.

"The general meeting of the Putty Club extended unanimous thanks to General János Boka for conducting yesterday's war like a military leader in history books and, as a token of our respect, it has been decided that each one of us should, at home, open our history books and there, on page 168, fourth line from the top, enter in ink—next to the title of János Hunyadi—'and János Boka.' This was resolved because our leader deserves it, because if he had not planned things so well the redshirts would have defeated us. And all of us are obliged to amplify the chapter on 'The Disaster at Mohács' by writing in pencil above the words 'Abbey Tomori'—who had also been defeated—and 'Feri Áts'.

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4.

"Despite protests, General János Boka had confiscated our club assets (24 *krajcárs*) because everybody had to give his all to help the war. Out of the entire amount collected, a bugle was bought for one *forint* and forty *krajcárs*, although it could have been bought for 50 or 60 *krajcárs* at Röser's Bazaar. Yet they had to buy the more expensive kind because it has a more powerful blare. Then we also captured one from the redshirts, so that now we have two military bugles, but don't need a single one any more; or, if we do, one certainly is enough. Therefore, it has been decided that the club demand the return of the club assets (24 *krajcárs*) and let the General rather sell one of the bugles because we must have our funds back (24 *krajcárs*). This he promised to do.

5.

"Pál Kolnay, president of the club, is hereby reprimanded by the members for allowing the official putty to go dry. Since it is necessary to have a record of the discussion I hereby enter it in the minutes:

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President: I didn't chew on the putty because I had my hands full with war matters.

Brother Barabás: Is that so? That's no excuse.

President: Barabás always likes to provoke and I ask that he mind the rules. I'll gladly chew the putty because I know what is expected of me as president of the club. But I won't stand for his gaff.

Brother Barabás: I'm not trying to provoke him.

President: Yes you are.

Brother Barabás: No, I'm not.

President: Oh, yes, you are.

Brother Barabás: Oh, no, I'm not.

President: Oh, all right. Have it your way.

Brother Richter: Fellow Members! I move that we go on record in the big book as reprimanding the president for neglect of duty.

The Members: That's right! Let's.

President: I only want to appeal to you that the club should excuse me this time, if only because I fought so well yesterday—like a wild lion. I was the adjutant and in the greatest danger I rushed out to the trenches and I was overcome by the enemy. I've suffered for our

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domain, so why should I now suffer separately for not keeping the putty moist?

Brother Barabás: That's another matter.

President: It isn't.

Brother Barabás: Oh, yes, it is.

President: It isn't.

Brother Barabás: Yes, it is.

President: Oh, all right. Have it your way.

Brother Richter: I ask you to carry my motion.

Members: Carried.

Members on the Left: We do not carry it.

President: Put it to a vote.

Brother Barabás: I move that it be voted on by name.

A vote is taken.

President: By a majority of three votes, the club declares Pál Kolnay reprimanded. I think it's a swinish trick.

Brother Barabás: The president has no right to cast slurring remarks at the vote.

President: Yes, he has.

Brother Barabás: He has not.

President: Oh, yes he has.

Brother Barabás: He has not.

President: All right, have it your way.

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There being no further business unfinished,
the president adjourned the meeting.

(Signed) "Leszik, Recording Secretary

" "Kolnay, President.

" 'I still think it's a dirty trick.' "

CHAPTER TEN

In the yellow little house on Rákos Street great silence reigned. Even the tenants, who usually gathered for loud gossip in the yard, tiptoed their way past the Nemecsek flat. Servant girls carried to the extreme back of the yard all clothes and rugs that had to be dusted; they belabored these objects with unwonted mercy in order to spare the invalid the irritation of noise. Had the rugs been able to indulge in reflection, they probably would have wondered why, instead of furious pummeling, they were treated to gentle taps today. . . .

And now and then the tenants peeped through the glass door:

"How's the little fellow?"

The answer was uniform:

"Bad, very bad."

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These kind-hearted women brought various presents:

"Please, Mrs. Nemecsek, take this bit of wine. . . ."

Or:

"If it won't offend you, here's some candy. . . ."

The little woman with the tear-dimmed eyes opened and closed the door for these sympathetic neighbors, cordially thanked them for their gifts; but had very little use for their offerings. She even said to one or two:

"The poor child does not eat a thing. For two days now we've hardly been able to pour a few spoons of milk into him."

At three o'clock the tailor came home. He had been away to a shop that used to give him work. Quietly and cautiously he entered the kitchen, but did not ask his wife anything. He only looked at her. And she at him. Silently they stood face to face; he did not even put down the garments he had brought on his arm.

Then, on tiptoes, both of them entered the room where the little boy was lying in bed. Oh, yes, a great change had come over the once merry private of Paul Street, now its saddened captain. He had grown thin, his hair was un-

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trimmed, his cheeks were haggard. He was not pallid, and perhaps this was one of the most woe-ful aspects of his illness—the fact that his cheeks were always red. But it was no healthy flush. It was the radiation of an inner fire that for days had been consuming him incessantly.

Father and mother stopped at the bedside. Poor, simple folk they were; there had been many an ordeal and vicissitude in their lives. Therefore, they did not grumble. They only stood there, with heads bowed, staring at the floor. Then, almost inaudibly, the tailor asked:

“Is he asleep?”

The woman did not dare reply by word of mouth. She merely nodded. For the little boy now lay in bed in a manner which prevented them from finding out whether he was asleep or not.

A timid knock on the outer door was heard.

“Maybe it’s the doctor,” the woman whispered. He said:

“Go open the door.”

The woman went out and opened the door. Boka was on the threshold. A sorrowful smile appeared on the little woman’s lips at sight of her son’s pal.

“May I come in?”

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"Yes, son."

He entered.

"How is he?"

"Nohow."

"Badly?"

But he waited for no answer; he went into the room, Mrs. Nemecsek behind him. And now the three of them stood at the bedside, the three of them did not utter a sound. As they stood there, the sick child seemed to sense their presence and that they were silent for his sake; he slowly opened his eyes. First he sadly gazed at his father, then at his mother. But when, at last, he espied Boka, he broke into a smile. In a voice that could scarcely be heard, he said:

"You here, Boka?"

Boka stepped closer.

"Yes, I'm here."

"Going to stay here?"

"Yes."

"All along . . . until I die?"

Boka did not know what to say. He smiled at his pal and, as if seeking advice, looked back at the woman. But she had her back turned with a corner of her apron over her eyes.

"You're talking nonsense, my boy," said the

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tailor, rasping his throat. "Hm! Hm! It's nonsense!"

But Ernö Nemecek gave no heed to what his father was saying. He looked at Boka and nodded his head toward his father.

"They don't know," he said.

Now Boka spoke up:

"Oh, yes, they know. Better than you do."

The lad stirred and, with great effort, raised himself from the pillow to a sitting posture. He would not permit anyone to assist him. He raised two fingers in the air and said with grim seriousness:

"Don't believe what they tell you. They're only joking. I know I'm going to die."

"It's not true."

"Did you say it's not true?"

"Yes."

The lad shot an indignant look at his pal:

"Maybe I'm lying to you? Eh?"

They tried to calm him and assured him that no one was trying to say that he was a liar. But he was implacable this time, resenting their doubt. Then he assumed a dignified look and declared:

"Well, then, I'll give you my word of honor that I'll die."

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The janitress stuck her head through the door:

"Mrs. Nemecsek . . . the doctor is here."

The physician entered and was respectfully greeted by all present. He was a stern old gentleman. He did not say a word. With a single nod of the head he went straight to the bed. He took the child's pulse, then stroked his forehead. He also placed his head close against the boy's chest and listened. The woman could not refrain from asking:

"Please . . . sir . . . is he worse?"

At last the doctor spoke up:

"No."

But he said it so strangely. He said it without even looking at the woman. Then he took his hat and made for the door. Humbly the little tailor ran ahead to open the door for the doctor:

"I'll see you out, sir."

Out in the kitchen, the doctor winked at the tailor to close the door. The poor fellow had a suspicion as to the meaning of the doctor's wish to see him alone. But it seemed to him as if the doctor's stern countenance had now become more benign.

"Mr. Nemecsek," said the latter, "you are a man, and I want to be frank with you."

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The tailor bowed his head.

"This little fellow of yours is not likely to last until morning. Perhaps not even until this evening."

The tailor stood motionless. Only some minutes later was he able to stir, mutely shaking his head.

"I'm telling you this," proceeded the doctor, "because you are a man and it is best that you be not unprepared. I think . . . you ought . . . to make . . . whatever arrangements . . . one is expected to make . . . at such a time. . . ."

He looked at the crushed little man a while longer, then suddenly placed a hand on his shoulder:

"God bless you. I'll be back in an hour."

The tailor did not hear these words. He was staring down at the spotless kitchen floor; he did not even notice that the doctor had departed. The one thought whirling in his mind was the necessity for making arrangements. He knew he had to arrange for something that was customary at a time like this. What did the doctor mean? Surely, not a coffin?

He reeled back into the room and sat down on a chair. He refused to say anything, despite his wife's entreaties:

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"What did the doctor say?"

He merely wobbled his head.

The little boy in bed suddenly seemed to have changed to a mood of cheeriness. He turned to Boka:

"I say, János, come here."

Boka went over to him.

"Sit down here on the edge of my bed. You're not afraid?"

"Of course not. What would I be afraid of?"

"Well, you might be afraid that I'll die while you are sitting here. But don't you worry about that. If I feel it coming on, I'll let you know in advance."

Boka sat down.

"What do you want me for?"

"Say," said the little fellow, putting his arms around Boka's neck and bending over to his ears as if eager to reveal some great secret, "what's become of the redshirts?"

"Why, we gave them a licking."

"And then?"

"Then they went to the Gardens and held a meeting. They waited there until late in the evening, but Feri Áts did not show up. They got tired waiting and went home."

"And why didn't Feri Áts appear?"

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"Because he was ashamed of himself. And he knew that he'd be fired because he lost the war for them. Then they had another meeting this afternoon. This time Feri Áts was there, too. Late last night I saw him here in front of your house."

"Here?"

"Yes. He asked the janitor how you were getting on."

This made Nemecsek very proud. He could not believe his own ears:

"You mean he himself?"

"Yes, he himself."

It made the lad feel good. Boka continued:

"So as I say, they held another meeting on the island and raised a devil of a racket. They quarreled terribly because all but two of them insisted that Feri Áts be fired off his job. Wendauer and Szebenics were the only ones on his side. Of course, both Pásztors were strongly against him because the older one wanted to become leader. The end of it was that they did fire Áts and elected the elder Pásztor in his place. But you know what happened?"

"What?"

"Just this. When finally they became quiet again and had their new chief, the watchman of

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the Botanical Gardens went over to them and said that the superintendent wasn't going to put up with their noise any more. Then he threw all of them out. The island was locked up. They put a door on the bridge."

Captain Nemecsek laughed heartily.

"That's not bad," he commented. "How do you know about it?"

"Kolnay told me. I met him on the way here. He was bound for the *grund*. The Putty Club is having another general meeting."

At this the little fellow made a wry face. Softly he said:

"I don't care much for that bunch. They entered my name in small letters."

Boka hastened to reassure him:

"That's been corrected. Not only that, but they wrote your name, all in capitals, in their big book."

Nemecsek shook his head dubiously:

"I don't believe it. You're telling me this only because I am sick and you want to console me."

"Not at all. I'm telling you this because it's true. On my word, it's true."

The sandy youth raised his emaciated fingers:

"Now you're even giving your word of honor to a lie, just to make me feel good."

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"But . . ."

"Don't say it!"

He had shouted it. He, the captain, at his general! Yes, in the fullest sense of the term. On the *grund* that would have been a fearful offense; but here it was not. Boka smiled indulgently.

"All right," he said, "if you don't believe me, you'll soon have a chance to see for yourself. They've made out a special scroll of honor and they'll be here with it any minute. They are bringing it to you. The whole club is coming."

But the invalid was still sceptical:

"Seeing is believing!"

Boka shrugged his shoulders. He thought "It's better that he does not believe it. He'll be much happier when he sees it."

But this conversation served to upset the sick lad. He was deeply hurt by the injustice done him by the Putty Club. He was rekindling his own wrath.

"You see," he said, "what they did to me was certainly nasty!"

Boka did not dare say anything more for fear of increasing the irritability of his little pal. When asked: "Don't you think I'm right?", he acquiesced.

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"The truth is," said Nemecsek, and sat up on his pillow, "that I fought for them as much as I fought for the others, that they should have the *grund*, too. And I know that it wasn't for myself at all because I'll never see the *grund* again."

He subsided. His tiny head was troubled by the dreadful thought of not seeing the *grund* again. Gladly would he leave all earthly things behind, if only he should not have to leave the *grund*, the "precious *grund*".

And that which had not happened throughout his illness now came to pass, at the thought of leaving the *grund*—tears welled in his eyes. It was not a feeling of sadness that made him cry, but rather an impotent rage against a mighty something which would not let him go to Paul Street once more, to linger under the fortresses or at the shack. In his mind's eye he now beheld the saw hut, the barn, the two tall mulberry trees, the leaves of which he used to pick for Csele, because Csele was a passionate breeder of silkworms that thrive on such leaves, and because Csele, being a fop, would be loath to risk his clothes on climbing a tree—so that Csele had sent him, Nemecsek, up the tree because he was the private. He also thought of

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the scrawny little iron chimney that gayly puffed snow-white cloudlets toward the blue skies, which quickly dissolved into nothing. He seemed to hear the familiar shriek of the buzz-saw as it encountered the logwood and cut it to pieces.

His face was flushed, his eyes shone bright. He cried out:

"I want to go to the *grund!*"

And, since no one responded to his cry, he repeated:

"I want to go away to the *grund!*"

Boka gently took his hand and said:

"You'll go there next week, when you're well again."

"No, no, no!" he insisted. "I want to go there now! Right away! Dress me up and I'll put on my Paul Street cap."

He reached under his cushion and, after some fumbling, triumphantly drew forth a flattened red-green cap, from which he had never parted for a moment. Now he put it on his head.

"Give me my clothes!"

His father sadly said:

"When you'll be well, Ernö dear."

But he was now beyond control. With all the power of his sick lungs he shouted:

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"I'll never get well!"

And, since he said this so vehemently, no one thought of contradicting him.

"I won't get well, I tell you!" he shouted again. "You're all lying to me because I am sure I'll die . . . and I want to die where I feel like it! I want to go out to the *grund!*"

Of course, that was entirely out of the question. All of them rushed over to him, tried to quiet him, to dissuade him, to explain to him:

"It can't be done now. . . ."

"The weather is nasty. . . ."

"Next week. . . ."

And again there recurred the agonizing words which they dared not utter in his intelligent presence:

"When you'll be well."

But everything they said was doomed to contradiction. When they spoke of the weather, the sun happened to shine warmly and brightly into the yard—the life-giving, radiant Spring sun which instills life into everything; only Ernö Nemecek could not regain his life. And the little fellow was fairly delirious. He flourished his arms, his face was flushed and his delicate nostrils were dilated. And he was declaiming:

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"The *grund* is a whole empire! You don't know what it means because none of you has ever fought for the Fatherland!"

There was a knock on the door. The woman went out, then came back and said to her husband:

"Mr. Csetneky is out there."

The tailor went out into the kitchen. This man Csetneky was a municipal employee who had all his clothes made by Nemecek. Upon seeing the tailor, he nervously said:

"What about my double-breasted brown suit?"

Inside, the lad's pathetic declamation continued:

"The bugles were blowing . . . and the ground was full of dust . . . Forward! Forward!"

"If you please, sir," said the tailor, "you may try it on now, but I must ask you, sir, to be kind enough to do it out here in the kitchen. . . a thousand pardons, sir . . . but my little son is very sick . . . in there. . . ."

"Forward! Forward!" came the hoarse childish cry from within. "After me, boys! Charge! Do you see the redshirts over there? That's Feri

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Áts and his silver spear in front . . . they're going to throw me in the water now!"

Mr. Csetneky could not help being attracted by the sound:

"What's that?"

"It's the poor child shouting."

"If he's sick, why does he shout?"

The tailor shrugged his shoulders:

"He's not really sick any more, sir . . . it's the end . . . the poor thing is delirious. . . ."

Then he fetched the double-breasted brown suit that was basted together with white cotton. As he opened the door, the lad was heard shouting:

"Easy there, in the trenches! Watch out! Here they come . . . they're here! Bugler, blow your horn!"

He made a funnel out of his hand:

"Trata . . . trara . . . tratata!"

And he shouted at Boka:

"You blow it, too!"

And Boka, too, was obliged to cup his hand. The two of them were blowing: one a tried, hoarse and piping voice, the other a robust, resonant voice, but equally mournful. Boka felt a lump in his throat, impending tears, but he

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kept at it, manfully, as if it were giving him genuine joy to imitate a bugle.

"I am sorry," Mr. Csetneky was saying as he removed his jacket, "but I am in great need of this brown suit."

"Trata! Trata!" persisted the sound within the other room.

The tailor helped Csetneky on with the garment. Then he quietly concentrated on the business in hand.

"It's a little tight in the arm-pit," said his customer.

"Yes, sir, I'll take care of that."

"Trata! Trata!"

"This button here is too high. Bring it down a little lower because I like to have the pressing show up well across the breast."

"Yes, sir."

"Full attack! Forward!"

"This sleeve seems to be slightly short."

"I don't think so."

"Just look at it well. That's your great fault, you make all sleeves too short!"

"It isn't my fault at all," the tailor murmured to himself and drew a chalk mark around the sleeve. In the other room, the noise grew louder and louder.

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"Haha!" cried the childish voice. "So you're here? Right in front of me! At last, I can catch you, you terrible chief! Well, now, come on! Let's see who is stronger!"

"Put a little padding," said Mr. Csetneky, "into the shoulder and here at both sides of the chest."

"Biff! Bang! There, I've knocked you down!"

Mr. Csetneky took off the brown jacket and the tailor helped him get into the one in which he had come.

"When will it be ready?"

"The day after tomorrow."

"Very well. Keep at it, so that I don't have to wait an extra week, as I did the last time. Have you any other work on hand?"

"If only the child weren't sick, sir."

Csetneky shrugged his shoulders:

"That is too bad, and I am very sorry for you but, as I said before, I really must have the suit in a hurry. Better tackle it right away."

The tailor sighed:

"You may depend on me, sir."

"Good day!" said Mr. Csetneky, and gayly made for the door. There he turned back once more:

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"Be sure to tackle it at once!"

The tailor picked up the handsome brown jacket, but his thoughts were on what the doctor had said. He must make such arrangements as are customary at a time like this. Very well, he would sit down to work. Heaven knows what the price of it may be needed for. Those paltry *forints* may roll into the purse of that cabinetmaker who makes coffins, while Mr. Csetneky in his new suit of clothes will go strolling chestily along the Danube Drive.

He went back to the room and immediately began to sew. He no longer glanced at the bed, but swiftly made his stitches in order to finish the job in record time. It was a rush order, in any event. Mr. Csetneky had to have it. So did the cabinetmaker.

The little captain was entirely unmanageable by now. He seemed to have regained some strength and he stood up in bed. His long nightie reached to his ankles. The red-green cap perched rakishly on his head. He saluted. The hoarseness in his throat turned to a rattling sound and his gaze furtively searched the air:

"General, I beg to report, sir, that I stretched out the leader of the redshirts. I want my promotion! Don't you forget that I am captain

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now! I fought for my country, and died for it, too! Trara! Blow it, Kolnay!"

With one hand he sought support by clutching the side of the bed.

"Fortresses, fire! Haha! There is Janó! Look out, Janó! Or they'll make a captain out of you, too! And your name will not be written in small letters! Fie! You're evil-hearted boys, you are! You're all jealous of me because Boka loved me and made me his pal—not you! The whole Putty Club is a lot of nonsense! I'll get out! I'll drop the club!"

Quietly he added:

"Please enter that in the minutes."

But the tailor toiling at his little bench still saw nothing and heard nothing. Nimbly his gnarled fingers manipulated needle, thimble and cloth. Not for the world would he look at the bed. He was afraid that a glance in that direction would discourage him from everything and would make him fling everything—Mr. Csetneky's brown jacket—to the floor, and then throw himself beside his darling child.

The little captain sat down in bed and mutely stared at the quilt. Boka softly asked:

"Are you tired?"

No answer. Boka tucked the quilt around

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him. His mother raised the pillow under his head:

"Be quiet now. Rest."

He looked up at Boka, but it was evident that he did not recognize him. There was puzzlement in his face. He said:

"Father . . ."

"No, no," said the general in a choking voice, "I'm not your father . . . don't you know me? I am János Boka."

Unintelligibly and in an exhausted tone the invalid repeated:

"I . . . am . . . János . . . Boka. . ."

Protracted silence. The little fellow closed his eyes and emitted a deep sigh, as if the anguish of every sorrowful human being had been lodged within his soul.

There was silence.

"Maybe he'll fall asleep," whispered the blonde little woman, who was completely exhausted as a result of excessive wakefulness.

"Let's leave him," Boka replied in a whisper.

They sat down on a battered couch. Now the tailor stopped, rested the brown jacket on one knee and dropped his head upon the low work bench. No one spoke. There was a drowsy

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silence in the air, except for the buzzing of a fly.

The sound of children's voices came drifting through the window. It seemed as though there had been a great many children out there, all of them talking in a whisper. Suddenly a familiar word struck Boka's ears. It was a name, whispered by someone in the yard:

"Barabás."

He rose and tiptoed his way out of the room. As he opened the glass door of the kitchen and stepped into the yard, he saw nothing but familiar faces. A group of Paul Street boys stood timidly at the door.

"Oh, it's you, boys?"

"Yes," whispered Weisz. "The whole Putty Club is here."

"What do you want?"

"We've brought him a scroll of honor, in which it is written in red ink that the club apologizes to him and that his name has been entered in the big book in capital letters. We brought the big book along, too. And here is the whole deputation."

Boka shook his head in chagrin:

"Couldn't you have come any sooner?"

"Why?"

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"Because he is asleep now."

Members of the deputation looked at each other.

"We couldn't get here any quicker because there was a great argument about who would be the head of the committee. It took us half an hour to elect Weisz."

The woman appeared on the threshold.

"He's not asleep," she said. "He's feverish again."

The boys stood rigidly. All of them were shocked.

"Come in, boys," said the woman, "maybe the poor thing will come to when he sees you."

She opened the door for them. They entered one by one, reverently and deeply moved, as if they were entering a church. Even before entering they had removed their hats. By the time the last one passed the outer door, which closed behind them, they were lined up on the threshold of the sick room. There they stood—mute, reverential and wide-eyed. They looked at the tailor, then at the bed. But the tailor did not raise his head, which rested on his arm. He did not weep. But he was very tired. The little captain in bed lay with wide open eyes, breathing heavily and deeply through his thin-edged

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little mouth. But he recognized no one. Perhaps he was already seeing things not visible to earthly eyes.

His mother shoved the boys forward:

"Go over to him."

Slowly they ventured toward the bed. But they had to encourage each other:

"You go first."

"No, you go."

Barabás spoke up:

"You're the chairman of the deputation."

Thereupon Weisz slowly walked to the bed. The others sidled up after him. But the little fellow was not looking at them.

"Speak to him," whispered Barabás.

In a quivering voice Weisz began:

"You . . . Nemecsek . . ."

But Nemecsek did not seem to hear. He was panting and staring at the wall.

"Nemecsek!" repeated Weisz with tears ready to burst from his eyes. Barabás whispered into his ear:

"Stop bawling."

"I'm not bawling," Weisz replied and was glad to have been able to say that much without actually crying. Then he braced up.

"Honored Captain Nemecsek!" he resumed

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and drew a paper from his pocket. "We're here . . . and I as chairman . . . in the name of the club . . . hereby . . . we were wrong . . . and all of us now beg your pardon . . . and in this here honor scroll . . . you'll find it all written out . . ."

He turned his head away to hide two glistening teardrops. Yet not for all the treasures of the world would he have abandoned the formal tone—their greatest pleasure.

"Mr. Secretary," he whispered to someone in the back, "please hand me the club minutes."

Obediently Leszik gave him the big book. Timidly Weisz placed it upon the edge of the bed and turned to the page marked "Minutes."

"Look here," he said to the invalid, "this is it."

But Nemecsek's eyes slowly closed. They waited a moment. Then Weisz said again:

"Look at it."

No reply. Now all of them drew nearer. The woman, a-tremble, crowded through and bent over her child.

"Say," she said to her husband in a strange, quivering tone of bewilderment, "he's not breathing . . ."

She placed her head on his chest.

"Oh, you!" she cried at the top of her voice,

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not heeding the presence of others. "He's not breathing!"

The boys drew back to one of the corners of the room. There they stood close together. The "big book" fell to the floor, open just as Weisz had left it.

The woman was screaming:

"Oh, husband! His hands are cold!"

And in the great, swathed silence that followed these words, one could hear the tailor, who had been motionless on his stool, his head upon his arm, suddenly burst into sobbing. Quietly, almost inaudibly, as befits adult men. And his shoulders shook convulsively. But even now he was not unmindful of Mr. Csetneky's handsome brown jacket; he slipped it off his knee, so as to prevent it from being stained by tears.

The woman embraced and showered with kisses the dead child; then she kneeled at the bedside, buried her head in the pillow and she, too, began to sob.

And Ernő Nemeček, member of the Putty Club, a captain of the Paul Street *grund*, lay upon the bed—in eternal silence, his face white as the wall and his eyes tightly closed. It was quite certain now that he neither saw nor heard anything of that which transpired about him,

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for angels had come to take the sight and hearing of Captain Nemecsek to the place where only such as Captain Nemecsek may see divine light and hear sweet music.

"We came too late," whispered Barabás.

Boka stood in the middle of the room, his head bowed. Only a few minutes ago, as they sat upon the edge of the bed, he could scarcely repress his tears. And now he felt with astonishment that no tears would come to his eyes, that he could not weep. Then he looked about, with an infinite void in his heart. He saw the boys huddled together in the corner. Weisz was in front with the honor scroll in hand, which Nemecsek did not live long enough to see.

Boka went over to the group:

"All of you go home now."

And these poor children felt relieved at the chance to leave the place, this strange little room, where one of their dearest pals lay dead. One by one they slunk out into the kitchen, thence into the sunny yard. Leszik was last. He stayed purposely. After all the others were gone, he tiptoed over to the bed, quietly picked up the minutes. Once more he looked at the bed and at the mute little captain.

Then he, too, left and joined the others out

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in the sun-kissed yard, upon the wretched young trees of which birds—gay little sparrows—twittered. The boys looked at the birds and stood bewildered. They could not grasp the situation. They knew that their little pal was dead, but did not know the significance of it. They stared at each other in wonderment, as do those confronted by something strange and beyond their comprehension, something seen for the first time in all their lives.

At sundown Boka went out in the street. He had much home work to do, for tomorrow promised to be a difficult day. An unusually heavy Latin period and, not having been called upon in a long time, he felt certain that Professor Rácz would make him answer some oral questions. But he had not the slightest desire for study. He flung both text-book and dictionary aside and left the house.

Thus he wandered aimlessly through many streets. But he seemed to avoid Paul Street and its familiar environs. His heart ached at the thought of having to see the *grund* on this day of bereavement.

Yet, wherever he went, something reminded him of Nemecesek.

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There was Üllői Avenue. . . .

This was where, with Csónakos, the three of them had sauntered by when they made their first scouting excursion to the Botanical Gardens.

There was also Köztelek Street. . . .

He remembered the day when, at noon, after class, they had stopped in the middle of this street and Nemecsek, with much ado, related how, on the day before that, the Pásztor boys took his aggies away. And Csónakos had gone over to the tobacco factory and sniffed some tobacco dust off the iron grating of the window. And, oh, how all of them sneezed!

Then the Museum grounds. . . .

Here, too, Boka chose to turn back. He felt that, the more he might shun the *grund*, the more irresistibly would he be drawn thither by a feeling of anguish. When he finally decided to go there, fearlessly and without any round-about route, his soul grew lighter with relief. He actually hurried in order to get there so much the quicker. And the nearer he came to their own domain, the deeper was the tranquillity which pervaded his soul. On Maria Street he felt carefree enough to break into a sprint. As he reached the corner and saw, through the

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growing dusk, the familiar grey fence, his heart gave a leap. He had to stop. He had no further reason for haste. He had arrived at his destination. Slowly he approached the *grund*, the gate of which was ajar. In front of the gate, leaning against the fence and puffing at a pipe, was Janó. As he discovered Boka, he grinned and beckoned to him:

"Ve lick 'em, dint ve!" he said.

Boka's reply was a sad smile. But Janó was in a mood of enthusiasm:

"Ve lick 'em . . . Ve trow 'em oud . . . Ve drife 'em away. . . ."

"Yes," said the general softly.

Then he stopped in front of the watchman, did not speak for a while, then replied:

"Janó, have you heard what happened?"

"What?"

"Nemecsek died."

Janó looked puzzled. He removed the pipe from his mouth:

"Vich one vas Nemecsek?"

"The sandy little fellow."

"Oh, yes!" said the Slovenian and replaced the pipe in his mouth. "Poor kid."

Boka entered. Now there was silence over the vast, vacant city lot, which had been the

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scene of so many cheerful hours. Slowly he walked the length of it until he reached the trench. The signs of battle were still in evidence. The sand was full of footprints. Parts of the breastwork had crumbled away when the boys crawled forth to attack.

Darkly the woodpiles stood side by side, with the fortresses on top of them; these were strewn with their own gunpowder: sand.

The general sat down on the breastwork and leaned his head upon his hands. Silence reigned throughout the *grund*. The scrawny little iron chimney was quite cooled at night, waiting for the morrow when industrious hands again would kindle the fire under it. The buzz-saw, too, had its respite, and the little hut slept peacefully under the budding vine. At a distance, as though heard in a dream, was the din of the city. Cabs rumbled past, human voices called to each other, and from the back window of some house, perhaps from the kitchen, which was illuminated, a merry tune came to fall upon his ears. It must have been a slavey singing.

Boka rose and walked around the side, toward the shack. He stopped at the spot where Nemecsek, like David of yore, brought to earth their Goliath, Feri Áts. He bent over the ground

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eagerly searching for the precious footprints, which were doomed to disappear from the sand just as his beloved little pal had departed this earthly life. The ground was broken up, but he could find no footprints. Undoubtedly he would easily have recognized Nemecsek's tiny footprints, for they were so small that they surprised even the redshirts at the time they came upon them in the Garden ruins. They were smaller even than Wendauer's. Oh yes, on that memorable day . . .

Boka walked on with a sigh. He went to fortress three, on the top of which the blond little fellow had first espied Feri Áts, who called down to him:

"Are you afraid, Nemecsek?"

The general was tired. His body and soul were wracked alike that day. He reeled about as if he had had a drink of some strong wine. With considerable effort he managed to climb up into fortress two, and he sat down to rest. Here at least no one could see him, nothing could disturb him; he could meditate upon cherished memories and could perhaps even weep awhile, if that were at all possible.

Breezes wafted voices to him. He looked down from the fortress and saw two dark little figures

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in front of the shack. He did not recognize them in the dark, but he listened for a clue in their voices.

The two boys spoke quietly.

"I say, Barabás," said the one, "you realize we're now on the spot where poor Nemecsek saved us all."

Then this:

"Say, Barabás, let's make up here forever and truly. There's no sense in us being sore at each other."

"All right," said Barabás, moved, "I'll make up with you. That's what we came for anyway."

Silence again. Thus they stood silently facing each other, each waiting for the other to give the sign of reconciliation. Finally Kolnay spoke up:

"Well, then, here's my hand."

Barabás, deeply touched, replied:

"And here's mine."

They shook hands and stood thus, hand in hand, for a long while. Then, without saying anything, they embraced each other.

That was that. A miracle, one might say. Boka, up in the fortress, was a silent onlooker. He, too, wanted to be alone and moreover, he

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mused, why the devil should he intrude upon them.

Then the two little men, softly conversing, started for Paul Street. Barabás was saying:

"There's an awful lot of Latin for tomorrow."

"Yep," agreed Kolnay.

"You have a snap," sighed Barabás, "you were quizzed yesterday. But I haven't been called on in a long time. My turn is due."

Kolnay said:

"You'd better be careful, because in the second chapter, lines ten to twenty-three are omitted. Is your book properly marked?"

"No."

"Surely you're not going to memorize the things that are left out, are you? Tell you what. I'll come to your house and mark up your book."

"Good."

Lo, their minds were on lessons already! How quick to forget! Although Nemecsek was dead, Professor Rácz was still alive. So were the Latin lessons and, above all, they themselves were still among the living.

They sauntered on and disappeared in the night. And now, at last, Boka was all alone. But he was restless up there in the fortress. And it was growing late, too. He heard the soft

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tolling of a church bell in the Josephtown section.

Boka dismounted from the fortress and stopped in front of the shack. He saw Janó returning from the Paul Street gate to his quarters. Running beside him was Hector, wagging his tail. Boka waited for them.

"Vell?" said the watchman, "young gentleman not go home?"

"Yes, I am going now," Boka replied.

Again the Slovenian broke into a grin:

"Home good warm supper."

"Yes, good warm supper," said Boka mechanically, and he could not help thinking that, at the poor tailor's on Rákos Street, two little human beings—the tailor and his wife—must be sitting down to supper now. And that there are candles burning in the room. And that Mr. Csetneky's handsome, double-breasted brown jacket is there, too.

He peeped inside the shack.

There he saw, leaning against the wall, a number of queer looking instruments. Round, red and white, thin slabs—discs somewhat like those used as traffic signals by railroad watchmen. And a three-legged contraption, topped by a brass

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cylinder. Also a number of wooden poles painted white. . . .

"What's all that?" Boka inquired.

Janó followed Boka's gaze:

"Oh, that? Belongs to engineer."

"What engineer?"

"Construction engineer."

Boka's heart gave a terrific leap:

"Construction engineer? What's he after?"

Janó took another whiff of smoke:

"They're going to build."

"Here?"

"Yes. Workmen come Monday, dig up *grund* . . . make basement . . . foundation. . . ."

"What!" Boka cried out. "They'll build a house here?"

"Yes, house," said the watchman laconically, "big three-story house . . . fellow who owns *grund* is building it."

And he went into the shack.

The world seemed to be whirling around Boka. Now even those pent-up tears came into his eyes. He hurried, then ran toward the gate. He must escape from this faithless strip of land, which had been protected by them at the cost of so much suffering and heroism and which was about to forsake them shamelessly in order to

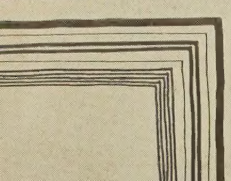
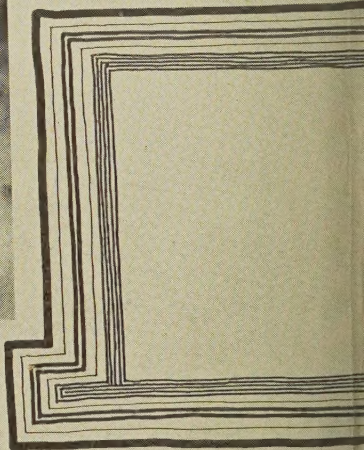
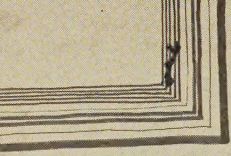
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take upon its back, for all times, a big tenement house.

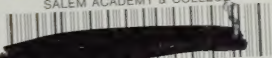
Outside the gate he looked back once again—as one who forsakes his country forever. The anguish that filled him at the thought of this was, however, slightly assuaged. He found consolation in the fact that, since poor Nemecsek could not live long enough to receive the official apologies of the Putty Club, he likewise was spared the mortification of being deprived of his *country*, for which he had given his life.

And next day, as the entire class sat in solemn silence and Professor Rácz gravely mounted his rostrum in order to eulogize the memory of Ernő Nemecsek and to urge the entire class to dress in black or, at least, in dark clothes and gather, at three o'clock tomorrow, at the humble abode on Rákos Street, János Boka stared grimly at the desk in front of himself. He was thinking about life—about life of which all of us, whether sad or gay, are servants.

THE END



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